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No. 22



# THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF MAR IVANIOS

Louis Moolaveetil, O. I. C.

St. Thomas Apost. Seminary, Vadavathoor, Kottayam 686010  
Kerala, India.

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OF  
MAR IVANIOS**

**Louis Moolaveetil, O. I. C.**

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## **THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF MAR IVANIOS**

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## **F O R E W O R D**

Ever since 1953, the 15th of July has been a holy day for the people of the Malankara Church. They commemorate the day with liturgical worship, ritual solemnities and public meetings of all proportions. For it is on that day Mar Ivanios the founder of the Reunion Movement passed into his eternal glory. That tens of thousands from all over the Malankara Catholic Community go on pilgrimage to his holy tomb is a clear evidence that Mar Ivanios is still living in the hearts and minds of these people.

Mar Ivanios, indeed, was one of the greatest church-men born and lived in India. The history of the Malankara Church in the 20th C. is inseparably connected with the history of Mar Ivanios. A close study of the life and mission of Mar Ivanios will show how he has influenced the historical course of the Malankara Church and thereby that of the Church in India down through the years.

Ever since the division of the ancient Church of St. Thomas in India into two sections, later the Malabar and Malankara Communities, this christian community had been losing its inner strength as the Church of Christ. Deprived of its autonomy and individuality, the Malabar Catholic community was stunted in its growth; cut off from the communion with

the Apostolic See of Rome and thereby from the ancient apostolic churches, the Malankara community was torn to pieces by vicious power-struggles and lost its spiritual vigour and missionary vitality.

Deeply disturbed by the inner conflicts and open rivalries in the Malankara Church, to which Mar Ivanios belonged, he struggled for a restoration and reconstruction of his community on a sound and solid foundation. The restoration of the ancient eastern Catholicate in Malankara was, no doubt, devised according to the masterplan of Mar Ivanios to re-establish the autonomy of the Malankara Church. Soon, however, Mar Ivanios found out that such external measures would not bring about the spiritual vigour that is required of a people of God. He was convinced that the material was no substitute for the spiritual and that only a deep religious life inspired by the christian spirit would cure the ailments of his community, that was being disintegrated by disunity, contentions and hatred. He spent long years in prayer and penance, discussion and consultation, to find out that only a life open to the Spirit and renounced to the world will have the strength to take up the challenge facing him. He decided to prepare himself for such a life and mission. This paved the way for the foundation of the Bethany Asram, which has turned out to be the most efficacious instrument in the hands of God to effect a spiritual renewal in the Malankara Church.

The immediate result of the renewal proposed and effected through the Bethany Asram was an awareness created in the hierarchy and



the people of the Malankara Church that its full growth would be possible only if it is brought into the Catholic Communion. Mar Ivanios realised, otherwise it would be like a tree without roots and a building built on sands. Co-operating with the grace of God he grew strong in this conviction and finally, together with a group of his people, entered into communion with the Catholic Church, giving rise to the great Reunion Movement of the 20th century. In fact, this was the only real solution to the problems that had been vexing the Malankara Church. For what it badly needed was a genuine and authentic christian life built on firm apostolic traditions and lived in communion with the universal Church. History has proved that the vision of Mar Ivanios has been inspired by God and it still remains the expressed will of God for the Malankara Church.

Any one who tries to spot out the secret of the success of the life and mission of Mar Ivanios will not fail to find out that it was his openness to the foundation of his spirituality and the strength of his convictions. This again gave him clarity of vision and concentration of power. It was out of this fountain he drew out strength of character and integrity of life. Except for such a deep and solid spirituality Mar Ivanios would not have been so successful in his life and victorious in his mission. Such were the problems he solved and the crises he overcame: such was the inspiration he gave and the leadership he took over in his Church.

Rev. Fr. Louis Moolaveetil O. I. C. has made an attempt to portray this great personality through his book: "The Spiritual Life of

Mar Ivanios''. The author draws our attention chiefly to the spirituality of Mar Ivanios and he helps us to understand the life of Mar Ivanios against this background. This I think, is certainly the most adequate approach to study the life of Mar Ivanios, as it is through his spiritual leadership that he is renowned most among his people. If the Malankara Church, both in its Orthodox and Catholic ramifications, was brought to its well-deserved status of a particular autonomous church in the world-map of Christendom from its low stature of a disintegrating community of divided Christians, it was owing to the brilliance of Mar Ivanios who, in his turn, grew tall in his stature of an eminent and uncompromising man of God through his deep spirituality of unshakeable faith in God, absolute surrender to Christ and complete openness to His Spirit.

Though the biography of Mar Ivanios has already been written in Malayalam and English, a discussion on his spirituality was long overdue the burden of which was assumed by Fr. Louis Moolaveetil, who certainly deserves our praise and approval for this task. The members of the Religious Congregations founded by Mar Ivanios must be thankful to Fr. Louis for having expounded the spirituality of Mar Ivanios which should be a subject matter for their careful and close study. The work has also its importance in the ecumenical field. At a time when the Malankara Church is undergoing a crisis of identity and faith, it will be very useful to examine once again the means and methods Mar Ivanios adopted to strengthen it, revitalizing and renewing it, in a similar situation. That would perhaps give also a clue to identify the underlying sources of its rising problems.

While I congratulate Fr. Louis for having brought to light this noble work, I pray that his earnest desires and hopes in writing this book be amply fulfilled. I do hope this book will be widely read and I wish all the readers spiritual joy and enlightenment. With this hope and prayer I present it to the public.

Fr. Cyril Malancharuvil, O. I. C  
Superior General.

Aug. 15, 1977  
Bethany Generalate  
Kottayam-686010.



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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AAS	Acta Apostolicae Sedis
AAT	Archives of the Archdiocese of Trivandrum
Am. Cath. Quart. Rev.	American Catholic Quartely Review
ASA	Archives of the Society of the Atonement at Graymoor (U. S. A.)
BA	Bethany Archives
CBE	Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia
CCHS	Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture
CSI	Church of South India
ECQ	Eastern Churches Quarterly
EDB	Encyclopedia Dictionary of the Bible
IA	Indian Antiquary (Bombay)
NCE	The New Catholic Encyclopedia
OC	Orientalia Christiana
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
OCP	Orientalia Christiana Periodica
PL	Patrologia Latina
PG	Patrologia Graeca.

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## INTRODUCTION

Every age of human history has had its typical men, the kind of man who sums up the spirit of the times in his interest and his goals. In the late Roman Age there were rhetoricians like Cicero; in the Middle Ages, kings and knights like Richard and Roland; in the Renaissance, adventurers and humanists like Columbus and Erasmus; in the modern age, astronauts like Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin, the first men who landed on the moon.

In each of these periods of history there have always been in the bosom of the church men who led saintly lives. These men did not escape from their society but rather extracted from their time what was best and transformed it. These 'timely' saints were a living proof that, no matter what the climate of society, the flower of Christian sanctity could always bloom. From the school of rhetoric came an Augustine and Basil, from chivalry, came a Louis of France; from the renaissance, came a Moore and a Xavier. Thus, the spirit of any era produces its own unique brand of sanctity.

In our century too, there was a 'man of sanctity and learning', a descendant of St. Thomas the Apostle, who excelled Augustine and Basil in rhetoric. He overcame Louis of France by conquering thousands of people and thus extended the kingdom of God on earth. He was considered no less to Francis Xavier in his zeal



for the conversion of India. This man was none other than a poor Syrian monk who spent a period of eleven long years in a forest contemplating the Eternal Truth and leading a life of prayer and penance. In this manner he prepared himself for his future career as a missionary to the millions in India. He is Mar Ivanios, known as the 'Newman of the East' and the founder of the Reunion Movement in India.

The purpose of this study is to examine the spiritual life of this great personality. It is an attempt to reveal the wonderful spiritual life that raised him to the height of sanctity, and to expose the admirable spiritual depths of him, who was known as a 'Guru' and 'Swami'. I have attempted to do this mainly from his own writings on religious matters, from his discourses, and from the Rules to the members of the Religious Institutes which he founded. Unfortunately, many of his writings are still in manuscript form and in the native language. To a large extent, in my explanation, writings and opinions of his contemporaries are also consulted, to form a clear and distinct idea on his spirituality.

We divide this study into three parts, of which the first part is historical which deals with the life history of Mar Ivanios and his works, his aspiration for a religious renovation in the Orthodox Church and finally, the foundation of Bethany Asram. The second part consists exclusively of his spiritual life, where we try to explain the image of Mar Ivanios' spiritual life as reflected in his Rules that he gave to his monastic followers. We also try to analyse the real motive force for his reunion with the Catholic Church and his filial

devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Third part is concerned with the very sources of his spiritual life. Here we examine the biblical liturgical and indigenous influence in the formation of his spiritual life and doctrine.

This study was originally a thesis presented at the Pontifical Institute of Oriental Studies in Rome for a Doctor's Degree in Spiritual Theology. No substantial change in the original work was found necessary, even though few additions and clarifications were made in order to make the study more vivid, more interesting and more profound.

I take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to Very Rev. Fr. Cyril Malancharuvil O. I. C., the Superior General of Bethany Congregation, for having written a foreword to this book. Sincerely I thank the Professors of Pontifical Institute of Oriental Studies for their guidance and in particular Rev. Fr. Spidlik S. J., who rendered me continuous help and assistance as the moderator of the original work. Finally I remember all who, in any way, contributed to the completion of this book. In gratitude for all these kindnesses, my prayer for each one of these is: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13: 13).

Fr. Louis Moolaveetil

St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary,  
Kottayam-10, Kerala  
September 8, 1977.

# **PART I**

## **Historical Part**



## CHAPTER I

### Mar Ivanios' Life and Works

Mar Ivanios, the founder of the Reunion Movement in India, was born on September 21, 1882 at Mavelikara, a small town in central Kerala, South India. He was the eldest son of his parents: Thomas and Anna Panikar. Little did his parents think, when they beheld their new-born babe, that he was destined in establishing the autonomy of the Jacobite Church in India under a Catholicos. Both parents were God-fearing Jacobite Christians belonging to the non-Catholic group in the Malankara Rite.<sup>1</sup> A few days after birth, that is on October 4, he received Baptism and Confirmation according to the Orthodox ritual and assumed the name of Gheevarghese Panikar.<sup>2</sup> He had

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1. 'Malankara' or 'Malankar' is another name for 'Kerala'. The Malankara Rite comprises of a Catholic group that came into existence by the Reunion of Mar Ivanios in 1930, and a non-Catholic group that consists of Syrian Orthodox, Marthomites, Anjoorians, Church of South India and St. Thomas Evangelicals. Mar Ivanios was born in the Syrian Orthodox Church.
  2. Mar Ivanios had a series of names, such as: George Panikar, P. T. Gheevarghese, M. A. Achen, Father P. T. Gheevarghese, 'Abun' or father of Bethany, Bethany Metran, and Mar Ivanios the Metropolitan. After his reunion with the Catholic Church in 1930, he was generally known as Archbishop Mar Ivanios. In this book for the sake of convenience and to avoid confusion I would like to use the name, Mar Ivanios, except where, for clarification purposes, it might be better to use one of his other names.

his early education in Protestant and Government schools, where he was described as “intelligent, observant and considerate”. It was these qualities which enabled him to meet with success in all his future undertakings. In 1897, at the age of fifteen, he began his high school studies in Mar Dionysius’ Seminary, Kottayam, South India. The next year, on the feast of the Exaltation of Our Lady, on September 20, 1898, he received minor orders. High school studies being completed, Gheevarghese Panikar was sent to Madras Christian College for higher studies and there, in 1906, he obtained his Master’s Degree. He was ordained a priest on September 15, 1908 by Vattasseril Mar Dionysius at Parumala Seminary, near Mannar, and he then began his career as a Principal in Mar Dionysius’ Seminary, Kottayam, South India. His great learning and deep spirituality attracted the attention of his bishop and faithful. It will not be an irrelevant fact to mention here that Father Gheevarghese Panikar was instrumental in establishing the Autonomy of the Jacobite Church in India under a Catholicos.<sup>1</sup>

While Father Gheevarghese was Principal in Mar Dionysius’ Seminary, he was called to be a Professor in Serampore University, near Calcutta (North India). And thus he resigned from the Seminary in 1913 and started teaching in the University. His life in Serampore was a time of preparation to fulfill his early aspiration, “to raise himself to the stature of a saint in the religious life of a

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1. Cfr. Fr. T. Inchakalody, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, vol. I, pp. 114-115, Trivandrum, 1957.

monastery".<sup>1</sup> There he was attracted by the writings of St. Basil the Great.<sup>2</sup> It was like adding fuel to fire and it gave him greater enthusiasm to monastic life. Later on, he, with some of the clerics who had followed him from Kottayam, started a quasi monastic life.<sup>3</sup> They made a fervent study of the religious life, adopting the Rule of St. Basil.<sup>4</sup> Thus his long cherished desire to be a religious was achieved. There he came to the conclusion that "those who want truly to serve God should spend all their life in acquiring union with God and that there is nothing more sublime than union with God in this valley of tears".<sup>5</sup> Therefore he retired from Serampore in 1919, and with some of his friends came into the jungles of Perunad and began his strict monastic life, following the Hindu monks in all possible ways except in faith and morals. Father Gheevarghese lived eleven long years in this wilderness, i.e. until he entered into union with the Catholic Church in 1930.<sup>6</sup> He was consecrated Bishop on May 1, 1925 by Kandanat Mar Ivanios, Mar Philoxinos (Vakathanam) and Mar Gregorios (Kundara) at Niranam

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, Chap. 2, PP. 24-34, Tiruvalla, 1929.  
Mar Ivanios, *Bethany Yogam*, PP. 10-11, Tiruvalla, 1930.
  2. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chap. 4, P. 21, Dublin, 1962.
  3. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, PP. 45-57, Tiruvalla, 1929; also  
Mar Ivanios, *Bethany Yogam*, PP. 14-18, Tiruvalla, 1930.
  4. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chap. 4, P. 21, Dublin, 1962.
  5. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, P. 58, Tiruvalla, 1929; Lc. 9. 23-25.
  6. Mar Ivanios' Reunion with the Catholic Church took place on  
September 20, 1930.

Church, near Tiruvalla. <sup>1</sup> “The asceticism”, says Varghese Karippayil, “of Father Gheevarghese and his monks spread a halo round the founder of the Order,<sup>2</sup> and in 1925 he was consecrated Bishop of Bethany in the Syrian Orthodox Church with the title Mar Ivanios.” <sup>3</sup> Mar Ivanios’ episcopal dignity gave an additional stimulus to the zest for Monasticism. Breaking a time honoured custom in the Jacobite church, Mar Ivanios founded a society of nuns, known as the “Sisters of the Imitation of Christ” or Bethany Sisters. <sup>4</sup> Thus the saintly soul wanted to have a spiritual renewal in the Syrian Orthodox Church, which lost much of its spiritual strength due to repeated divisions and mutual quarrels.

After his Reunion with the Catholic Church on September 20, 1930, Mar Ivanios visited Pope Pius XI in 1932. His words of salutation to the Pope are noteworthy: “I came to your Holiness as the prodigal son returned to his Father’s house.” <sup>5</sup> From 1932 to 1953 he was the Archbishop of Trivandrum, in Kerala, South India, and the Metropolitan of Malankara rite. Under his guidance the Reunion movement grew in number and strength. Hundreds of separated brethren followed his footsteps. Seeing

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1. Cf. Mar Ivanios, *Bethany Yogam*, P. 43, Tiruvalla, 1930.

2. Mar Ivanios’ monastery was called “Bethany Asram”, or “Order of the Imitation of Christ.”

3. Mr. Varghese Karippayil, *The Reunion Movement in India* P. 55, Tiruvalla, 1964.

4. See, Mar Ivanios’ own account on the foundation of the Bethany Convent in *Girideepam*, PP. 133-317, Tiruvalla, 1929.

5. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chapter 12, Page 73, Dublin, 1962; Lc. 15. 17-19.



the wonderful growth of the Reunion movement, this saintly man on his deathbed could say like St. Paul, "I have fought the good fight. I have run the race. I have finished the course and for the rest, there is laid up for me the crown of life".<sup>1</sup> Mar Ivanios died on July 15th, on the feast of Our Lady of Carmel. In the history of the Indian church, his name is written in golden letters as well as in the book of Saints in heaven.

### Works

During the early 20th century, there was an urgent need for a spiritual revival among the Orthodox Christians in South India. This was the time when Mar Ivanios started his ecclesiastical career. He, being a learned man—in fact the first one who obtained a Master's Degree in his community—intended to eliminate this spiritual aridity through his preachings and writings.

Concerning Mar Ivanios' eloquence, he had a wonderful gift of tongues like his contemporary Bernard Shaw, the twentieth century literary giant. His speeches were interesting, inspiring and instructive. Regarding his fluency in speaking and writing English he was the twentieth century Dr. Johnson and Gold Smith respectively. Of his eloquence, Father William J. Dunne S. J., President of the University of San Francisco, says: "Mar Ivanios has the gift of tongues and a magnetic eloquence that his own territory draws all after him." He continues: "On one occasion

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1. Cf. Mar Ivanios' Pastoral letter on September 21, 1952 PP. 14-15 Trivandrum, 1952; II Timothy 4.7. This was his last Pastoral letter.

he was preaching in the open when it started to rain. His Excellency wished to dismiss the crowd by saying that the Lord was sending His blessings from Heaven, and he would not keep them to get wet. They stayed on and said they were willing to be drenched to listen to him.”<sup>1</sup>

Mar Ivanios' literary activities, started in 1905, covered a period of five decades. During this time he wrote many books, periodical articles and booklets in English and Malayalam. Later he felt the necessity for the establishment of a press for the progress of the evangelization. Even before Vatican II he was conscious of the importance of the mass communication media for evangelization. With the help of some of his foreign friends he bought a printing machine and published a large number of devotional books and pamphlets. Thus, through its instrumentality he disseminated sound Christian literature in the mother tongue among the people. Mar Ivanios was also one of the most brilliant orators of the 20th century, whom Mark Antony<sup>2</sup> would have envied if the latter were to attend his speeches. And in debating and other literary expressions, it will not be an exaggeration if he is called an incarnation of Socrates. “Mar Ivanios' knowledge”, commented one of his listeners, “his skill in debate, and the depth of his convictions, have gained the admiration of many intellectuals of his time.” He made

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1. Speech delivered by William J. Dunne, S. J. in the University Auditorium of San Francisco on April 26, 1948: B. A.

2. Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar'.

generous use of the devices of metaphor, comparison and parallelism in his sermons and homilies. He often quoted from St. Basil, St. Pachomios, St. Benedict and St. Chrysostome, who is his patron saint.

### **Mar Ivanios' writings (mostly in Malayalam)**

- 1 Alma Prakasam, Tiruvalla, 1926.
- 2 Before God, Tiruvalla, 1926.
- 3 Bethany Constitutions, of 1919: 1931; 1938; 1951.
- 4 Bethany Yogam; A book containing Mar Ivanios' speech, exposing the nature and ideals of Bethany, Tiruvalla, 1929.
- 5 Bible Stories: (3 vols.), Tiruvalla, 1925.
- 6 Catechism Books (9 vols.), Tiruvalla, 1934.
- 7 Confession of a penitent soul, Tiruvalla, 1930.
- 8 Christian Liturgical Year, Tiruvalla, 1926.
- 9 Entry into the Holy Church, Tiruvalla, 1927.
- 10 The First Book of Aramaic: A syriac Grammar book for the use of the high school students, Tiruvalla, 1949.
- 11 Girideepam: It contains the history of Bethany, especially of its origin, nature and ideal, Tiruvalla, 1929.
- 12 Handbook of the Holy Mass, New York, 1947.
- 13 Hardhava Prardhana, Tiruvalla, 1927.
- 14 Jeevaprakasam, Tiruvalla, 1923.
- 15 Love of God: 30 meditations on love of God, Tiruvalla, 1927.

- 16 "The Malabar Reunion", Pax April, 1931, No. 114,  
pp. 1-5.
- 17 Marga Prakasika, Tiruvalla, 1929.
- 18 Meditations on H. Mass: Meditations on the  
principal parts of the H. Mass,  
Tiruvalla, 1923.
- 19 Meditations on Humility, Tiruvalla, 1926.
- 20 Meditations for H. Week: Reflections on important  
events in the Passion week Liturgy,  
Tiruvalla, 1926.
- 21 "A New Branch of the Tree of Life: The Syro-  
Malankara Church", The Eastern Branches of the  
Catholic Church, New York, 1938, pp. 27-35.
- 22 Occasional prayers, Tiruvalla, 1927.
- 23 Papamochanam, 4 vols, Tiruvalla, 1923.
- 24 Prardhana Sahai, Tiruvalla, 1926.
- 25 Prathidinaprakasam, Tiruvalla, 1926.
- 26 Prayer Book of the Malankarites, Tiruvalla, 1925.
- 27 Rubrics of the Malankara Mass, Tiruvalla, 1941.
- 28 Sannyasa Jeevita Sahai, Tiruvalla, 1926.
- 29 The Second Book of Aramac, Tiruvalla, 1949.
- 30 Swargapatha, Tiruvalla, 1929.

### **Important Dates in Mar Ivanios' Life**

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| 1882, September 21: | Mar Ivanios was born at<br>Mavelikara   |
| 1882, October 4:    | He received Baptism and<br>Confirmation |

- 1898, September 20: Minor Orders
- 1900, January 9: Ordained Deacon by Mar  
Dionysius Pulikott
- 1908, September 15: Ordained Priest by Mar  
Dionysius Vattasseril
- 1908–1913: Principal of Mar Dionysius'  
Seminary, Kottayam
- 1913–1919: Professor at Serampore  
University, (Calcutta)
- 1919, August 23: Foundation of Bethany Asram,  
at Perunad
- 1920, on Pentecost Day: His religious profession
- 1925, April 28: "Ramban" (Bishop-elect)
- 1925, May 1: He was consecrated Bishop of  
Bethany
- 1925, September 8: Foundation of Bethany Convent  
–the religious profession of the  
first three sisters (Sr. Shaino,  
Sr. Huba, Sr. Denaha)
- 1929, February 15: He became Archbishop of  
Bethany
- 1930, September 20: Reunion with the Catholic  
Church
- 1932, May 2: Received by Pope Pius XI in  
Rome
- 1947–1948: His visit to U. S. A.
- 1948: Visit to Australia
- 1952, September 14: Received the Last Rites
- 1953, July 15: Death of Mar Ivanios
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## CHAPTER II

### **Mar Ivanios in the Syrian Orthodox Church and his Aspiration for its Renovation**

Jesus Christ founded a Church for the redemption of mankind.<sup>1</sup> This Church was born in the Middle East as a small community in the Roman Empire. Not long after its beginning, this community first spread into the Greco-Roman empire through the apostles and then to the different parts of the world. The Christian community in India claims to have its origin from the Apostle St. Thomas. It is believed that the Apostle sailed in one of the trading ships in 52 A. D.<sup>2</sup> and landed at Cranganore, then an important sea port on the Malabar coast.<sup>3</sup> First he preached the Gospel to the jews and he then turned to the heathens. As a result of his preaching many high caste Hindus became Christians. Throughout southern India he is reported to have founded seven Christian

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1. Mt. 16:18; Mk. 16:15.

2. Daniel, D. D., F. Ph. S. Rev., *The Malabar Church and other Orthodox Churches*, p. 1, Harippad, Kerala, 1950.

3. 'Malabar' is a fairly narrow stretch of land of about 15000 square miles on the south western corner of India. 'Mala' in the vernacular means 'Mountain' and the word 'varam' means 'valley'. The Portugese and some western writers called the land 'Serra' and 'Malabar'. In Sanskrit 'Kerala' means 'land of coconuts'. In Independent India it is called Kerala.

Churches. It is also said that St. Thomas laboured in the kingdom of Gundaphrous in northern India<sup>1</sup>. It is commonly believed that he even went to China to preach the Gospel. When he returned he was put to death, presumably in the year 72 A. D. at Mylapore, near Madras, and was buried there. His remains were afterwards taken over to Edessa in Persia.<sup>2</sup> The passages in the 'Acts of Thomas' referring to Christian communities in India, indicate that at that early date already, the redactor not only knew about their existence but was also aware of their link with his own syrian church, viz., with those Syrians who venerate St. Thomas as their Apostle.<sup>3</sup>

The members of the early Christian community, known as Thomas or Syrian Christians, eventually increased in number due to conversions and immigrations.<sup>4</sup> From early times onwards

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1. Wicki S. J., *India, N. C. E.*, Vol. VII, Pp. 435-444.

2. Fr. Placid C. M. I., *Church of the Thomas Christians*, P. 24 (unpublished notes) Rome, 1967.

3. All serious scholars who now-a-days are dealing with the subject agree that the 'Acta Thomae' were written in Syria and almost all of them are of opinion that the original text was in Syriac i.e. the redaction on which the Greek translation was based. Cfr. Commentary by A. F. J. Klijn, 'The Acts of Thomas', *Suppl. Nov. Test.* V (1962) Leiden. A survey of the literature on the problems is to be found in E. Hennecke & W. Schneemelcher, *Neutest. Apokryphen*, II Tubingen, 1964 pp. 297-199.

4. In the year 345 A. D. a band of 400 Christians consisting of a bishop, Mar Joseph of Edessa, several priests, deacons and laymen immigrated to the Malabar coast and settled down at Cranganore: Cfr. Daniel D. D. op. cit., p. 9. Also Card. Tisserant, *Eastern Christianity in India*, p. 8, Calcutta, 1957.

they were in close contact with the See of Edessa<sup>1</sup>, which was then the theological centre of the chaldean church. According to Cardinal Tisserant, these people were definitely connected with the See of Selucia-Ctesiphon about 450 A. D. This was the time when the Mesopotomian-Persian church was receiving their Bishops from Mesopotomia where the same rite of liturgy was practised.<sup>2</sup>

### **Life and Liturgy of Thomas Christians**

The Syrian Christians, the first disciples of St. Thomas, lived a life in accordance with their faith received from their Apostle. They loved their liturgy, which sprung from a christian tradition. Above all, their devotion to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was specially praiseworthy. Everybody attended Sunday Mass, observed Sundays and obligatory days, abstaining from all servile works. According to a sixteenth century document during the Mass, at the elevation: "they rose up and their heads down to the ground and said that "they were unworthy to look at Christ's Body under the appearance of bread".<sup>3</sup> Following the ancient customs of the non-Catholic priests

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1. Tisserant, op. cit. p. 10.

2. Tisserant, op. cit. p. 10.

"There is no shred of evidence", writes, Fr. Placid, "to show that on the Malabar coast, there existed a definitely shaped liturgical rite other than the East Syrian, one of the Selucians before the 14th century", Cfr. Rev. Fr. Placid op. cit., p. 45.

3. Silva Rego, *Documentacao para A Historia Das Missoes Do Padroado Portugues Do Oriente II*, Lisboa, 1947, p. 359.



among them, they did not speak to non-Christians for hours before Mass. They joined the priests to sing the Divine Office. The Churches were thronged with worshippers who were happy to spend hours in prayer and worship. Their devotion to the Blessed Mother of God and to St. Thomas was noteworthy.<sup>1</sup> In short, their life was a liturgy centred one.

### **Their Standard of Morality**

The standard of morality among the St. Thomas Christians was highly praised. They considered the family to be very sacred. The father enjoyed supremacy in the family and the children obeyed him in all things. In the family the greatest concern of the parents was the education and formation of their children.<sup>2</sup> Religious life was considered to be a must for attaining one's salvation. There were monasteries for men and convents for women.<sup>3</sup> "There were Anchorites and Cenobites in Malabar before the 16 century.<sup>4</sup> Paulinus of St. Bartholomeus O. C. D., at the end of the 18 century saw the ruins of religious houses at Angamale, Edappally and Mailakkomp.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Cfr. Placid C. M. I., *The church of the Thomas Christians*, p. 50.

2. Cfr. Kochuthoman Apothikari, *Parishkarappatiri*, Kottayam, 1893.

3. Raulin Johannes Facundus, O. S. A. *Historia Ecclesiae Malabarissae cum Synodo Diamperitana*, Romae. 1745, p. 387-383.

4. Placid C. M. I., *The Syro-Malabarians, their life and activities*, Roma (1956).

5. Paulinus of S. Bartholomeo, O. C. D. *Viaggio all' Indie Orientali*, Roma, 1796, p. 80.

## Social Status of Thomas Christians

Speaking of The Thomas Christians' social status, writes Dr. Placid: The Malabarians have had a very high social status..... They were considered equal to Hindu nobility..They had several privileges, even royal ones which no other community or caste possessed.... They were lords of eighteen castes who were prepared even to court death in defence of their masters.... They also had a king as their protector... They even shuned the approach of low-caste people. The king conferred upon them honours and many titles such as 'Mappilai', 'Panikkar', 'Tharakan' etc. They were allowed many privileges, such as riding on elephants, sitting before kings, and travelling in Palanquins. Carpets or clothes were spread for them to walk over during a marriage procession and other feasts. They were permitted to use the royal umbrella ('muthukuda') and even had the right to kill a Nair who would not give them precedence on public roads. <sup>1</sup> All these were high socio-political privileges enjoyed by the high caste Hindus of the country. <sup>2</sup> Because of their influence at the palace, Thomas Christians were greatly respected by the rest of the people. According to Lacrose, the sixteenth century historian, the Syrian bishop exercised absolute powers on everything in addition to spiritual. <sup>3</sup>

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1. Placid C. M. I. op. cit. p. 52; Cfr. also *The Thomas Christians* by Placid J. Podipara, C. M. I., pp. 80-85, Bombay, India, 1970.

2. Daniel D. D., op. cit. p. 31-34.

3. Ibid. p. 32.

## Division and its Consequence

At the end of the fifteenth century<sup>1</sup> the Portuguese came to India to establish commercial relations between India and Portugal. They saw the Thomas Christians as a strong, politically privileged and a socially advanced group, superior to other castes. Later on when the Portuguese crown was empowered to evangelize India they found the Thomas Christians using the East Syrian rite. Being ignorant of Syrian practices and customs, they tried to reform their traditional liturgy. On the pretext of Nestorian infiltration in faith, the Portuguese influenced the Syrians to accept their jurisdiction.<sup>2</sup> Thus the Syrian church gradually began to lose that which is genuinely Syrian. This led to the latinisation of the Syrian church. Ignorance about the Syrian customs and traditions, liturgy and theology gave a boost to Roman jurisdiction. The whole Syrian church, though dissatisfied with their influence, remained under them until 1653, when a great number of Syrians separated themselves, by swearing that they would never remain under their jurisdiction and obey their bishops.<sup>3</sup> This oath, known as the 'Koonan Cross Oath', was followed by unfortunate events that have lasting effects in the Christian history of India. The dissatisfied assembled at Alagand on May 22, 1653, five

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1. Vasco de Gama first arrived in India in 1498. Then onwards the Portuguese people, especially merchants in the beginning, started coming to India.

2. Cfr. Tisserant. *op. cit.* p. 27-68.

3. *Ibid.* p. 79.

months after the oath, and twelve priests imposed hands on the archdeacon <sup>1</sup>, and proclaimed him Metropolitan, Mar Thoma I. Henceforward Mar Thoma performed pontifical functions, ordained clerics, gave dispensations in marriage impediments etc. The secession spread gradually over the whole of the Malabar Church. <sup>2</sup> Later in 1665, at the arrival of a foreign Jacobite bishop <sup>3</sup>, the members of this separated group placed themselves under the jurisdiction of the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch. Thus the seed of dissension sown by the Portuguese manifested itself in the existence of the Syrian Orthodox church in India. It was in this church, a little more than two centuries after its formation, George Panikar, the world famous Mar Ivanios was born, ordained priest, and finally became one of its leading personalities. For its spiritual amelioration he also founded two religious communities, as we have already seen one for men and the other for women. However, in order to satisfy his spiritual conscience and thus to attain salvation, he finally left his Church and accepted the true Catholic faith.

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1. "Erat Archidiaconus in Ecclesia malabarica qui quasi Vicarius Generalis latinus cum ampliore potestate gubernabat totam eparchiam. Unus tantum erat Archidiaconatus praeterea videtur fuisse officium haereditarium." Cfr. *Fontes Juris Canonici Syro-Malakarensium*, Fonti Serie II, Fasc. IX, Vatican.

Concerning his political status, Cfr. *Noticias do Reino do Malabar*, Biblioteca-Nacional, Fondo Geral., 537, ff. 1-29 Lisboa.

2. E. Tisserant, op. cit. p. 79-80.

3. Cfr. P. J. Podipara, C. M. I., *The Thomas Christians*, p. 156, Bombay, India, 1970.

The Jacobite Church of Malankara, after its separation from the mother Church passed through many crises. Its members went wandering in a spiritual desert, while the church itself became a fertile field for periodical quarrels and divisions. Due to conflict of opinions and undue desire for independence, many independent communities came into existence. Thus, there was the formation of the Independent Church of Anjoor, <sup>1</sup> Syrian Anglicans, <sup>2</sup> Marthomites, <sup>3</sup> and the St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India. <sup>4</sup>

This deplorable condition of the Jacobite Church caused great anxiety of its future even among leaders. For example, Bishop Gregorios Gheevarghese (later Catholicos Basilius III) wrote to his predecessor, Catholicos Basilius II, "I have no hope in the future of our church. God has abandoned us, no doubt. I repent that it happened that I am born in it" <sup>5</sup> The Malankara Metropolitan Mar Thoma IV, in 1750 A. D. wrote to the Jacobite Patriarch, "Malankara Jacobite Church is likely to perish and, in the opinion of

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1. E. M. Philip, op. cit. PP. 184.

2. Tisserant, E. *Eastern Christianity in India* PP. 146-147.  
Placid, C. M. I., Dr., op. cit. P. 112.

3. "Marthomites" are the Jacobites who seceded from the main body about the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They are also known as the Reformed Church. Cf. *The Church of the Thomas Christians*, by Placid, C. M. I., op. cit. p. 113.

4. Tisserant, E., *Eastern Christianity in India*, PP. 148-149.

5. Tisserant, E., *Eastern Christianity in India*, pp. 148-149.

many of its followers, it is good. There exists conflict of ideas among the followers of the Catholicos themselves. In the same way also in the Patriarch's Party.... In this circumstance it is very difficult for a community to continue for a long time." <sup>1</sup> Mr. Thomas Matthew Thaikat B.A.L.T., a prominent member of the Syrian Orthodox Church, wrote: "Let us think about the forty-seven churches saved from the hands of Menesis. Those 47 churches have increased to 400 churches and five lakhs of people. It may be asked how they prosper. There are not enough schools to educate the children in a Christian atmosphere. The youngsters are educated by the people of other denominations in accordance with their faith. These few high schools that they have are the places of mischievous party spirit. Since they have no college, there is no influence among the intellectuals... As a result of all this, in the last three decades our community has become a place for strife and quarrels. There are no able bishops and priests to lead the revolutionaries into the right way of action." <sup>2</sup>

All these quarrels, lawsuits, lack of peace, and absence of a permanent spiritual head, failed to implant the spiritual life of the church and its members. "I doubt," writes a leading member, "whether there is any other religious community in Christendom so much worn out, both spiritually and socially" <sup>3</sup> Patrose Ramban says, "There is no wonder

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1. Philipose Ramban, *Telescope*, pp. 236-237 (1924)

2. Thomas Matthew Thaikat, B. A. L. T., in *Church Weekly* March 23, 1947.

3. Varkey, A. M., M. A. B. L., Cf. *Attempts for peace in the Jacobite Church*, by Inchakalody, T., p. 41, Tiruvalla 1949.

that there exists internal conflict and quarrel in the church because our church has failed to implant a spiritual life in our priests and laity.”<sup>1</sup> The branch that is cut off from the vine cannot bear fruits.<sup>2</sup> The separated brethren travelled down the centuries in spiritual aridity. They discovered that peaceful life was not possible.<sup>3</sup> It was with this spiritual renewal in mind that Mar Ivanios instituted the monastic way of life in the Malankara church. A leading layman, Mr. Philipose, wrote to Mar Dionysius, then Metropolitan: “As a result of all this, the divine peace given by the Risen Lord to the church, his spouse,<sup>4</sup> is long lost. Civil war, quarrels, divisions, differences in opinions and disobedience to the Bishops have taken place. For the last forty years lawsuits and quarrels are going on in our church. Due to lawsuits we have been destroyed; we have been an object of ridicule for others. We should think deeply whether we want peace and unity or lawsuits and quarrels.”<sup>5</sup>

From all this, one may get a clear picture of both spiritual and social conditions of the Jacobite Church after its separation from the Catholic Church. Down through the centuries many movements for peace arose one after another. But all failed in

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1. Varkey, A. M., M. A. B. L. Cfr. *Attempts for peace in the Jacobite Church* by Inchakalody, T., P. 41, Tiruvalla. 1949.

2. St John, 15:4.

3. Inchakalody T., *Jacobite Church and Reesh Patriarch*, p. 5, Trivandrum (1950).

4. John 14:27

5. Philipose A., in a letter to Mar Dionysius, op. cit. P. 156.

achieving their end. On the other hand, quarrels and divisions became more common among the people. This pitiable state reached the climax at the time when Mar Ivanios, as a young priest, began his service in his Church. Two opposing factions came on the fore, that were known as the parties of the Catholicos and of the Patriarch. Each side struggled against the other over the jurisdiction and the temporality of the Church.<sup>1</sup> “The latest division”, writes Fr. Placid, “was caused in 1910 by the action of the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch, Abdullah who claimed jurisdiction over the temporalities of the Malabar Orthodox Church. One half of the Malabar Jacobites protested and were, for this reason, excommunicated by the Patriarch. Those who were excommunicated came to be known as the Bishop’s Party, while those who agreed with the position of the Patriarch were referred to as his party, Interminable quarrels and lawsuits followed between the adherents of the two groups”.<sup>2</sup>

Mar Ivanios, then Father Gheevarghese, was on the side of the Catholicos.<sup>3</sup> He was the chief aid and adviser to Mar Dionysius Vattasseril, who, as Metropolitan of Malankara Church, held the highest post in the Malankara Church. As a brilliant

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1 E. Tisserant, *op. cit.* p. 153-154.

2. Placid, C. M. I. Dr., “The Syro-Malankarites: the Silver Jubilee of their Reunion,” *Unitas*, Vol. VII, P. 19.

3. Mar Ivanios was instrumental in establishing the autonomy of the Syro-Jacobite Church in India under a Catholicos (1911-12); cf. Mar Ivanios’ Pastoral Letter on Sept. 21, 1952, P. 4; and *Bethany Yogam* PP. 10-11.



young priest, he had planned many of the strategical moves of his party and was the principal spokesman for his side. This even made him the object of attack and of physical violence.<sup>1</sup> Speaking of this, the Reverend V. T. Thomas writes: "While Mar Ivanios was principal of the M. D. Seminary High School, Kottayam, he was very much pre-occupied with the litigation that was going on between the two parties in the Jacobite Church. It was his position and obligation to go around, meet many people, procure witnesses, and attend to so many matters that he had neither rest nor peace"<sup>2</sup>

### **Mar Ivanios' experience**

This experience and the circumstances favourable to this, shook the spiritual sensitivities of Mar Ivanios. Though he was vigorously fighting for the autonomy of the Malankara Church under the Catholicos and was succeeding gradually in his efforts, still this great and holy man was not satisfied with the achievements. Those material successes and the monetary gain did not give him the peace of mind which he desired. So he reflected: "When I reviewed the conditions of the Malankara Church since the year 1872, I suffered unbearable pain. Like one wave after another in the ocean, there were many unfortunate, unpleasant, and unnecessary situations. I saw quarrels,

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, PP. 1-24. In these pages he gives a detailed account of this troubled period of the Jacobite Church.

2. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, P. 20, Dublin, 1962 Thomas Inchakalody, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, PP. 114-124, Trivandrum, 1957.

lawsuits, competition, and mob fighting appearing on the scene. I understood that even, the true canons of the Holy Church were being overlooked. As I pondered over these things, I wondered if it was possible to fulfill the ultimate intentions of God in founding Christianity in Kerala already in the first century or to uphold the essential ideals and interests of the whole community in Malankara, or to secure its continuous prosperity. I knew the present stage of the Malankara Syrian Community was such that, if one or two self-interested men so wished, they could twist it into any distorted form without difficulty. And it is difficult to see the foreseeable future to restore a pleasant calmness which would end the quarrels and would quench the thirst for lawsuits. If the members of the community quarrel, the church would suffer; the suffering of the church, in turn, affects the community. Are these not real impediments to the acquisition of true devotion and Christian holiness?"<sup>1</sup>

The spiritual apathy, into which the Jacobite Community had fallen was a source of great anguish to Mar Ivanios.<sup>2</sup> In those moments he prayed, "Jesus Christ, O God, bring peace and tranquility to your Holy Church. Protect it lovingly, so that there may not arise in it, quarrels and lawsuits. Give refuge to it under the shadow of your cross. Lay your holy hand on it in blessing. Illumine its eyes that it may see your holy face. O Redeemer of the world,

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Giridlepam*, PP. 70-71 Tiruvalla, 1929.

2. Margaret G bbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chapter 3, P. 12, Dublin, 1962.

look into the depths of its heart and aid it, so that it may realize that your holy will is its sacred duty.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Mar Ivanios' aspiration**

Mar Ivanios, then Father Gheevarghese, meanwhile started a religious revival through prayer and penance. He believed that through these spiritual forces, he could restore the spiritual status of the faithful, which had been lost. He was convinced that the social and moral degradation had been the consequence of the spiritual degeneration. He even wrote about it to the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius Elias.<sup>2</sup> He felt that he had a duty to perform. “It is only the uplifting power of a great ideal that can save any community,” he wrote to the editor of a leading daily paper, “to show forth this ideal is, I believe, my vocation now.”<sup>3</sup> It seems that, here, Mar Ivanios is alluding to the fact that spiritual uplift of the community is to be sought through a personal renewal in spiritual life. In Mar Ivanios' aspiration for a spiritual renovation in his community, his mind passed through various stages before it reached its final spiritual visions. It is interesting to read his own account of his thoughts at this stage in his book, “Girideepam”. In the beginning, Mar Ivanios' conviction was that only education could heal the spiritual wounds of his community.

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, P. 46, Tiruvalla, 1929.

2. See Appendix III.

3. Letter of Mar Ivanios to Mamman Mappila, quoted by T. Inchakalody in *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, vol. I, pp. 407-409

“I hope”, he said, ‘to accomplish the spiritual uplift of the community by means of education and sanctification of its clergy,<sup>1</sup> He foresaw that the education of the clergy would enlighten the laity. This is true to the fact that “Nemo dat quod non habet”. – “nobody can give what he has not”. A priest cannot train others in the spiritual life or communicate the doctrines to others, if he himself is not trained or instructed first in them. Mar Ivanios, moreover, knew that one by his ordination, is constituted a “teacher in Israel,”<sup>2</sup> and has the mission to “go and teach all nations”.<sup>3</sup> He is ordained to impart to the people the precept of salvation and how he can give to others what he himself does not have. “The lips of the priest”, says the Holy Ghost through the Prophet Malachias, “shall keep knowledge and they shall seek the law at his mouth.”<sup>4</sup> The same Holy Spirit warns those who belittle the wisdom necessary for the ministers of God through the prophet Osee: “Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee and thou shall not do the office of priesthood to me.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Mar Ivanios' intention to found a religious community**

When Mar Ivanios started his work as a priest in his Church, he soon realized that many priests among the clergy lacked the necessary knowledge and, as a result, a loose life existed among

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1. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chapter 3, P. 10, Dublin, 1962.

2. St. John, Chapter III, 10

3. St. Matthew Chapter XXVIII, 18-20

4. Malachias, II, 7

5. Osee, IV, 6

them.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, his first aim was to form a group of clergy which would be educated in the truths of the Church. This was the main reason why he left his native land and went to Serampore, where he accepted a professorship in a Protestant University. He thought that taking such a step would help to realize his long cherished desire of educating the clergy of his church. He also thought that it would eventually lead to the opening of a theological seminary in Kerala. History shows that Mar Ivanios did his best for the fulfilment of this idea. As soon as he arrived in Serampore, he persuaded many youngmen, clerical as well as lay, in his church to come to Serampore, to take up studies in a variety of subjects.<sup>2</sup>

Mar Ivanios was not yet satisfied with this plan. A series of questions passed through his mind. He questioned "whether the long cherished objectives, namely, the creation of schools and the founding of a theological seminary, for which he left his native place and came to Serampore, were possible in the present conditions. Even if they were, could they last? And, if they did, were they able to bring about the true progress of the community? Did the real interests of the Community consist in these things? Would it not be better to employ the clerical students, who were there with him, for something more important and urgent for the Community and more pleasing to God than

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, P. 39, Tiruvalla, 1929.

2. See Mar Ivanios' own account about this in his book, *Girideepam*, pp. 44-46, Tiruvalla, 1929; also "The Motives of Mar Ivanios for his Reunion with the Catholic Church" by Athanasius Ayrookhuziyil in *Unitas*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3 (1966).

merely founding schools and seminaries ?”<sup>1</sup> He thought, that the spiritual improvement of his Community could be made through a missionary society. He said to himself, “The most important duty of the Christian Church is the spread of the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> Its motto should be the witness of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer.<sup>3</sup> Lack of schools is not a great obstacle to evangelization. Whether we do or do not have schools and seminaries, the spread of the Gospel is absolutely necessary for the glory of God. The institutions which the community needs for its social welfare and timely progress would somehow be taken care of. There are people for it. There are opportunities for it. But I have to use my stay at Serampore to prepare labourers for the preaching of the Gospel.<sup>4</sup> Such workers, in order to heal the wounds of the community, can do so many things; such as, to go about the parishes preaching missions, find solutions for the spiritual problems of the people, create a religious attitude in children by teaching them catechism, proclaim the Gospel among the infidels, etc. Most of the deacons could be expected to have interest in such work. There cannot be two opinions that such a missionary society could lead the Malankara Syrian Church to greater glory in the future, provided that it is made of people who have a divine vocation, ready to work without any desire for reward, and that those be excluded who are ready to do anything for the sake of their stomach. Once they finish their studies, such a missionary group of

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, PP. 49-50, Tiruvalla, 1929.

2. St. Matthew 28:18-20.

3. Acts 1:8

4. St. Matthew 10:37

deacons could be formed here at Serampore. Those who would like to work outside Malankara, proclaiming the Gospel, may do so. Others who prefer to work within the Church in Malankara may so choose. Still others who like the field of education may follow it.”<sup>1</sup>

One may ask here what might have been the motivating force for this change in his ideas. Who inspired him to have this new thought, that is, the spiritual improvement of his Community through the foundation of a missionary society? Surely, one can say that it was the work of the Holy Spirit! For he says, “I cannot definitely say why such a change of mind came about during the course of my stay at Serampore.”<sup>2</sup> But, he confesses, “This thought of the missionary society so possessed my mind and heart that I could not get rid of it even in my sleep. When I had to engage myself in any act of divine service, I was offering to God this heart of mine burdened with the thought of the missionary society.”<sup>3</sup>

Days and months passed. Mar Ivanios spent most of his time in prayer and penance. He did this so that he might know whether or not God would want him to form a missionary society and how he might go about forming such a society. He maintained a specific programme of many practices

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, PP. 50-52, Tiruvalla, 1929.

Thomas Inchakalody, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, Chapter 10 P. 136.

2. Ibidem. P. 51.

3. Ibidem. PP. 52-53.

and penances which were exacting and difficult. He felt that some invisible power had taken possession of his mind and was drawing it along the road of a missionary society. Because at that time there was no one to dedicate himself to the service, both spiritual and material, of the Community. But he continued praying to God that he might know what might be his final motives for a missionary society. After serious considerations he came to the conclusion that a mere missionary society would not serve the great purpose he had in mind. He said to himself, "from a spiritual point of view, a missionary society is necessary for the progress of my Community. But if we think about its practical sides, there are many things which may hinder its growth in the future. When self-interest and popularity have place in the hearts of its members, then its downfall has begun. It cannot be expected that all who join the missionary society will continue forever in the service of God in the same spirit. Wordly considerations and attractions may obscure their vision. Misunderstandings, competitions, self-glorifications, and the like may enter an institution in which all have to work as members of one body. If the members get married, they will be unable to evangelize with zeal." <sup>1</sup> He continued asking himself, "What is the use of founding a society unless its members are both united in ideals and firmly determined in their career and in their daily life?" <sup>2</sup> Finally, he came to the conclusion

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, PP. 53-54, Tiruvalla, 1929.  
Thomas Inchakalody, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, PP. 141-143, Trivandrum, 1957.

2. *Ibidem*. P. 54.



that a society must be formed of members who have service of God as their rule of life and who nourish it daily in true piety. Only then can such a society bring about true progress in the Syrian Community and achieve good results in both their spiritual life and evangelization. The man in the pit can only be saved by a man standing outside the pit. Preaching the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ should be done not merely by talking and preaching but mainly by behaving in a virtuous manner and by loving our neighbour as we love God. Therefore, the establishment of a mere missionary society would not be sufficient to achieve the intended goal, that is, the spiritual uplift of the people.

It is good to read Mar Ivanios' own account about it. "My mind," he says, "again began to waver in pain, for I would not have any guarantee that the missionary society would achieve my highest hopes. Since I had consecrated myself fully to God, I decided just to wait until God revealed his holy will. In prayer, in meditation and, above all, in the Holy Mass I kept on waiting. I prayed to God, merely, to make my disciples and me ready to live for the glory of His holy name, whatever the cost, even if it should mean leaving our country and our people, and suffering great hardships." <sup>1</sup> Here we see his zeal for the Kingdom of God.

"Many months," he continues, "passed in this way. I felt that my heart, placed before God like soft wax, was acquiring the shape of an ideal

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, P. 55, Tiruvalla, 1929.

and was assuming beauty in its concepts. I believed that He would assuredly give it form. My heart remained free. I offered it there and I waited. I had to pass through many trials. Only those who have had the experience know the bodily and mental difficulties involved in the denial of oneself. At last I came to realize that union with God is more sublime than the service of God. Men have various objectives in life. But, if possible, those who truly desire to serve God should spend all their life in acquiring union with God. There is nothing more sublime than union with God in this valley of tears.”<sup>1</sup>

One may see here, that his early ideal of the progress of his Community had undergone extensive purification and spiritual sublimation. He is now totally possessed and motivated by the love of God and the will to serve Him. Thus there was a change of heart -‘Metanoia’- in him. He was fully possessed by the Spirit. In short, the will of God has become the norm of life. Imitating the true evangelists who ‘having left everything followed Christ’<sup>2</sup> and finally acquired union with God, Mar Ivanios resolved to follow Christ through a religious state. “Only those who lead a religious life”, he said, “can practise mortification, both interior and exterior. To a religious, wealth, fame and popularity are synonymous with poverty, defamation, and calumny. When a religious appears foolish and mad in the eyes of the world, he enjoys perfect happiness. Sacrifice and poverty are

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, P. 55, Tiruvalla. 1929.

2. St. Matthew 4:18-22.

for those who are indifferent to life and death. So I decided that God's will was to found a religious society composed of souls consecrated to him and that I should spend the rest of my life and energy in realizing the fulfilment of this ideal. After days and months of prayer and study, this ideal, which was obtained, I considered to be a great pearl. I then strove onwards to obtain the knowledge necessary for carrying out this ideal." <sup>1</sup>

In conclusion we may say that the christian community in India continued to exist in its apostolic and Catholic faith until the seventeenth century when a small group separated themselves and joined the Jacobite Church. Due to quarrels and divisions, members of this Community gradually became spiritually arid and morally degraded. This was the time when Mar Ivanios started his life in this community. He earnestly desired for its spiritual renovation and his aspiration finally culminated in the idea of founding a religious Congregation. And towards its fulfilment he decided not to leave any stone unturned.

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, PP. 55-57, Tiruvalla, 1929.

## CHAPTER III

### **Foundation of Bethany in the Syrian Orthodox Church**

The work of a creative personality is explained by his spirit. This law also applies to the foundation of communities in the Church. However, in saying this we presuppose the initiative of Divine Providence, which is the first cause of their origin. The process of foundation like any creative activity, is determined by a general ideal emanating from the founder's mentality and disposition. If he possesses an extraordinary creative genius, he is immune against environmental influences foreign to his nature. Within the sphere of natural causes, he is therefore originator of his foundation which bears the character of his personality. This creative activity is self-realization to such a degree that the founder's person becomes inseparable from his foundation. His work cannot be detached from his person if it is to preserve its essential integrity. It is this personality and mode of thought that provides the clue to the understanding of his foundation and its environment.

The foundation of Bethany Asram<sup>1</sup> is no exception to this general rule. The

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1. Indian term 'Asram' signifies 'Community'. The first monks chose as their patrons the saints of Bethany, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus; so the Religious Institute as well as the Religious houses were called 'Bethany'.

Cf. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, P. 69, Tiruvalla, 1929.

Bethany Institution founded by Mar Ivanios is a standing example for his personality and spiritual outlook. When he was raised to the bishopric, he said, "The Bishop of Bethany is one who prefers to walk in the footsteps of the Anchorites <sup>1</sup> of the early church, who in the wilderness embraced poverty as riches. Also, in our Hindu land we see ancient 'Rishis' <sup>2</sup> who spent their lives in the wilderness. The Anchorites of the ancient church, as well as the superiors in those religious groups, were men inspired with the same ideal of life. The fitting residence for a Bethany bishop is the 'hut' in the Bethany Asram...for the Bishop of Bethany Asram, it is not necessary to change the earthenware that we use for meals in our Bethany Asram". <sup>3</sup> This was not an exaggeration of spirituality or humility; it was an expression that came from the bottom of his habitual thought that shows his desire to the ascetical life. This was the life to which he committed himself at a time when there was no monastic life among the Jacobites in South India. He was so filled with that religious ideal.

Mar Ivanios' religious life got deeply rooted in Serampore, North India, where he was a professor from 1913 to 1919. He himself gives an account of this: "When I was eight or ten years old I

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1. It seems that here Mar Ivanios is alluding to St. Ephrem for whom he had great veneration. For St. Ephrem, the highest form of monastic life consisted in Anchoritism: see *History of Ascetism: in the Syrian Orient* by Arthur Voobus, Part II, P. 84. Louvain, 1960.

2. The word 'Rishi' means an inspired sage.

3. Mar Ivanios' speech on the occasion of his consecration as bishop in 1925, AAT.

desired to lead the religious life of an Asram. This desire gradually occupied my heart above all other things and I began to realize the importance of attaining salvation through such a way of life. This desire, which was deeply rooted in my heart, later turned out to be the ideal of my life. It was during my stay in Serampore that my long cherished desire materialized.<sup>1</sup> His life in Serampore provided him with the required time and tranquility to work for the realization of his life's goal. There he maintained a programme of many exacting and difficult practices and penances.<sup>2</sup> He dedicated himself to contemplation and to a fervent study of different religious orders and congregations in the Catholic Church and to the lives of the saints. Thus he was fully equipped both intellectually and spiritually to embrace the monastic way of life. His learning and piety enabled him to exercise effectively his leadership in the way Saint Paul has put it, that is 'not as domineering over the flock but being examples to them'.<sup>3</sup> This example attracted many of his disciples who were seeking a more perfect way of life and they followed him. He read a good deal of literature on most of the important schools of spirituality in the Catholic Church and was greatly inspired by it. He said, "I found St. Basil laying great stress upon religious chastity as the foundation of monastic life, St. Francis of Assisi seemed to be pointing to holy poverty<sup>4</sup> as its

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1. Mar Ivanios' speech on May 1, 1925, AAT.

2. See Mar Ivanios' own account about this in *Girideepam*, P. 53, Tiruvalla, 1929.

3. I Peter 5:1.

4. St. Matthew 19.21.

basis, and St. Ignatius Loyola seemed to be teaching that religious obedience, which means living in closest possible union with God and enabling the perfect accomplishment of His holy will, was the be-all and end-all of the means of attaining perfection. Since St. Benedict, however, regarded stability as so fundamental to the religious state he made it one of the four vows of religious. As if to crown it all, St. Francis de Sales came, teaching that the sanctification of the common actions of everyday life was indispensable to the attainment of sanctity in the religious life; in fact, it would be this way in any life. I felt myself drawn by special ties of admiration and veneration for the saints, and craved for the heavenly joy of communion with them".<sup>1</sup> Finally, with the permission of his bishop, Mar Dionysius Vattaseril, Mar Ivanios started a quasi monastic life with his followers in Serampore. There, they obliged themselves to keep the religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Their daily life was comprised of recitation of the Divine Office in community at a fixed time, morning and evening meditations, examination of conscience, etc. They imposed upon themselves the rule of Great Silence beginning after night prayers and ending with the next day's morning prayer that was preceded by meditation.<sup>2</sup> They followed the Rule of St. Basil<sup>3</sup> with the necessary adaptations and modi-

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1. V. Karippayil, *The Reunion Movement in India*, P. 56  
Tiruvalla, 1964.

2. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, PP. 61-62, Tiruvalla, 1929.

3. *Ibidem*, P. 131.

The Rule of St. Basil was, to some extent, put into practice. They followed the book, *A Summary of the Rule of St. Basil the Great*. This book was drawn up and translated from Greek by Mother Edith—a member of the Oxford Mission Sisters of the Epiphany, Barisal—for the Bethany monks.

fications which the circumstances demanded. <sup>1</sup> The Rule of the Great Silence was the rule most rigidly observed by them. This was well illustrated by an incident that happened one night. When all were in a deep sleep, one, whose couch was next to the pantry, found himself awakened by the sound of a jackal that had entered the store room. He poked his neighbour in the ribs and they, after pausing to arouse the others, ran to find weapons. Thinking that a bandit raid must be going on, the whole community looked around for the enemy. Guided by the frantic leaping of the unfortunate jackal, they converged upon his prison and soon sent him away. Yet throughout the whole episode, every lip was sealed and not a word was spoken. They had kept the great silence unbroken. <sup>2</sup> Margaret Gibbons said, "Reverend Professor thus continued to guide his Basilians in Serampure". <sup>3</sup> Thus Mar Ivanios laid the foundation of the Bethany Institution in Serampure. "I am really happy", he said, "that I founded Bethany in Serampure itself." <sup>4</sup>

Though Bethany had its origin in Serampure, its formal establishment as an institution took place in the wilderness of Perunad. After Mar Ivanios retired from Serampure University and came to Kerala, it was here in Perunad that he started a strict monastic life together with some of his companions. This was on the Feast of Our Lady's Assumption in 1919.

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1. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, P. 21, Dublin, 1964.

2. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, PP. 62-65, Tiruvalla, 1929.

3. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, P. 25, Dublin, 1964.

4. Mar Ivanios, *Bethany Yogam*, P. 15, Kunnamkulam, 1930.



Father P. T. Gheevarghese (later Mar Ivanios) and nine of his followers entered the premise. Then, prostrating after the Jacobite fashion, they began their austere lives in order to acquire the height of holiness.<sup>1</sup> The names of the other nine are: Fr. Alexios of Niranam, later Mar Theodosius, Deacon Jacob, later Mar Theophilos, Deacon Koshy, later Samuel O. C. D., Gheevarghese of Chengannoor, later Fr. Gheevarghese O. I. C., Jacob of Mavelikara, later Fr. Barsleeba O. I. C., Oomen of Sooranad, later Ramban Baskeepa, Abraham of Kallooppa, later Father Abraham O. I. C., Isaac of Mavelikara, later Fr. Isaac, Varghese of Pulikeezhe, later Father Varghese.<sup>2</sup> Thus for the first time in the history of Malabar Orthodox Church there arose a religious community (known as the Order of the Imitation of Christ or simply Bethany Asram.) Later on Mar Ivanios also founded an Order for women (1925, Sept. 8) in the Orthodox Church. The members of this community are called the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ or simply Bethany Sisters.<sup>3</sup>

On the occasion of this event, Mar Dionysius Vattasseril, the Bishop of Fr. Gheevarghese, (later Mar Ivanios) sent a pastoral letter, which reads, "...To bring about a rebirth and regeneration in the spiritual life and apostolic activity in our Church, Bethany asram has been founded by Father

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1. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Dublin, 1964, p. 31.

2. Cfr. Thomas Inchakalody, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, Trivandrum, 1957, P. 152.

3. Cfr. *Fontes juris Canonici Syro-Malankarensium*, Fonti Serie II, Fasc. IX, Vatican, p. 103.

Gheevarghese. . . . The Bethany monks, with our apostolic blessings and trust in God, have decided to spend their lives in religious discipline and apostolic activities. All the members of our church should co-operate with them and help Bethany. We humbly pray that God Almighty, who may bring about great things from small beginnings, may bless the Asram and make it a source of blessing to the church and a cause for the growth for the kingdom of God. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

### **Mar Ivanios' life in Perunad**

By dedicating themselves to prayer and renunciation of all worldly things and desires, Mar Ivanios and his followers started living together as a community. It was deep in the quiet wilderness of Perunad that Mar Ivanios attempted to establish this community life. The prayer life of Mar Ivanios and his monks was a heavy one but this was what he wanted. He desired to give honour, praise, and glory to God in every possible way. He planned a daily schedule to consist of the celebration of Holy Mass, the recitation of the Divine Office, meditation, examination of conscience, spiritual reading, visits to the Blessed Sacrament,<sup>2</sup> devotion to the Blessed Virgin

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1. Pastoral letter of Mar Dionysius, then Malankara Metropolitan, issued in 1919, Parish Archives, Kaippattor.

2. Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament in the churches was not customary among the Orthodox in South India. However, when Mar Ivanios started his monastic life in the wilderness of Perunad one of his first innovations was the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament for adoration: Cfr. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, P. 32 Dublin 1962.

Mary, prayer for Christian Union, etc. Occasionally, the monks also went out to preach retreats to people of all age groups, to hear confessions, to visit the sick and the aged, to teach catechism, etc. In its entirety, Mar Ivanios' life in the Perunad Forest could be compared with Christ's life in that, just as Christ prepared Himself thirty years for his three years of missionary life, so, too, Mar Ivanios prepared himself eleven years in the Perunad Forest for his future missionary life. The sole desire of the monks was to imitate Christ in all simplicity, following in His footsteps, 'whose kingdom is not of this world'. The Divine Office, which was chanted by the monks in choir was regarded as their pre-eminent duty and occupation. It was there in this forest that they led a life of absolute poverty and privation. They had nothing as their own, just as St. Ephrem who possessed nothing, not even a cane or a bag.<sup>1</sup> Thus it was both an active and contemplative Order.

For their bodily support, all worked hard.<sup>2</sup> During their first months in the Perunad Forest, they cleared the land to enable them to plant gardens. They were so poor that they could only cultivate the necessary fruits and vegetables. For their water they dug a well. It might be interesting to know what a tedious job it was for them to obtain that water. When they first arrived and settled down to live in the forest land, there was no water for them to drink. In order to quench their thirst and obtain

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1. *Testament*, P. 247, Cf. P. 286.

2. Mar Ivanios, *op. cit.*, PP. 83-90.

water for cooking purposes, it was necessary for them to go a long distance to a lake. However, one day their determination to find water led them to the discovery of a cool bubbling spring in the forest. After their long search, they dug for a well over this spring. Eventhough they found water, Mar Ivanios and his monks found it an hardnut to crack to obtain it for their utilization. He and his monks had to measure a long distance to this spring to get water for their daily uses of drinking, cooking, and gardening. They found it a bed of roses to carry the water in pots on their heads to the monastery. After a long period, they were able to dig a well near the monastery. Though they were able to draw water from that well during most of the year, the summer season threw a challenge on them. But as a counter challenge they walked a long distance again to the well in the forest. Because they were well aware of the fact that this worldly life is a mixture of roses and thorns, just like the two sides of a coin. <sup>1</sup>

Planting gardens and obtaining water were only a few of the hardships they willingly and lovingly endured for God. The worst was yet to be faced. They were very austere in everything. They could not make both ends meet, eventhough they were not burning the candle at both ends. Of course this world is meant for the survival of the fittest. They, in unison strived to keep their heads above water in order to reach their destination. There was no cook; they did all their own cooking. Their clothing was

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam* PP. 82-83, Tiruvalla, 1929.

very poor; poorer than poverty; they even wore it literally after being mended and patched many times. And they were delighted in wearing such old clothing so with all sincerity they could call, with Saint Francis of Assisi, poverty, 'sister'. They did everything themselves including their own washing and cutting their own hair.<sup>1</sup> Thus they showed the world that their pleasures were not of this world.

### **Bethany a place of pilgrimage**

Bethany Monastery eventually became a place of pilgrimage and shelter, especially for the deprived and unwanted children. To the Asram were brought many children who had been abandoned. Day by day, the number of orphans increased. As a result, soon to be established by the monks, was an orphanage which would provide for these poor unwanted children. In his book, 'Girideepam', Mar Ivanios himself narrates an interesting anecdote that shows how the Divine Care protected these innocent children through the instrumentality of these monks.... One day the brother who was in charge of the kitchen found that there was nothing to eat, not even a morsel of food in the house. There was no money with which to buy food and no means of obtaining any food from the neighbourhood. All the orphans were informed about this shortage of food but they weren't able to do any thing about it except to cry, which is what any child would do if he had nothing to eat. Finally, the Abun

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1. Cfr. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, P. 35, Dublin, 1962.

(Mar Ivanios) was informed of this matter. He immediately cried out, "Well, now let us go and pray". And they all went directly to the chapel to pray. While they were there, the brother in charge of the guests, heard the sound of the ropebell hung outside the compound. This ringing sound signalled that a new guest might be arriving. When the brother heard this sound, he became very worried because there was no food or drink to offer the new guest. However, he went out as usual to greet them. Behold, instead, what he saw was a man carrying a huge basket of rice cakes and plantains! The Abun finally concluded the event by saying that on that particular day the children, thankfully, did not have to starve. <sup>1</sup>

The first inhabitants of Bethany in Perunad were not all priests. <sup>2</sup> In the beginning Father Gheevarghese was their spiritual director and guide. Later, after proper training, some of them were ordained priests and deacons in order to administer the sacraments to the other brethren. For the apostolic activities, they also visited different churches, especially on Sundays and holy-days of obligation.

Days and months passed by in this way. They were preparing themselves for their profession in the religious life. "The feast of Pentecost", says Mar Ivanios, "was fast approaching." Those who were going to pronounce their vows were fully engaged

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, PP. 92-93, Tiruvalla, 1929.

2. There were only two priests among the first ten members:  
Cf. *Archbishop, Mar Ivanios*, by Thomas Inchakalody, p. 152.

in immediate preparation. They were fully aware of the great responsibility to which they were going to be raised. They knew well that their dedication was irrevocable and, by submitting themselves to the will of God, they were to undergo any hardship or even death, to sustain the divine love in them. A 'Sanyasi' is the one who dies to the world and lives for Christ. For him, honour and worldly reputation have no value. He would not strive for any happiness other than the real happiness which follows, by abandoning everything for the sake of God. By dedicating himself to the religious life, a 'Sanyasi' accepts poverty as a crown over his head. He is a citizen of the heavenly court. His only motive in life would be the genuine love of God. He should not make any mental restrictions when he tries to do the will of God. As a fish in the water, a 'Sanyasi' should always be in communion with God. These were the ideas they were assimilating during the retreat in preparation for their profession.<sup>1</sup>

The long awaited day, the feast of Pentecost, in 1920 finally arrived. Father Gheevarghese, surrounded by the monks and a few others, offered Holy Mass in the chapel. During Holy Mass, Father Gheevarghese, in an exhortation, reminded the monks about the importance and obligations of the vows which they were going to take. "Sanyasm (religious life)" he said, "can be compared to a sacrificial cow." This sacrificial cow has to pass through four different stages before it is sacrificed. First, it should be separated

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, PP. 127-128, Tiruvalla, 1929.

from the herd. Secondly, after it is brought to the temple, it is tied somewhere outside the temple. Thirdly, on the day of its sacrifice it is cut into pieces, from which the blood and the best part of the flesh are taken for sacrifice. Finally, the priest burns the flesh in the sacrificial fire and sprinkles the blood over the altar. The greatest offering of the Jews is the offering of the holocaust. In any other sacrifice only a part of the flesh is offered; the other portion is for the priest. But, in a holocaust everything is offered to God. 'Sanyasm' is a sacrifice of holocaust. In the same way, the 'Sanyasi' also separates himself from others. By his own accord, he also comes to the premises of the temple which, in this case, is the monastery where he is waiting for the day of sacrifice. Here, by his own tears, he washed himself from all malice and stain. On the day of sacrifice he should be beheaded; on that day, he immolates himself. The triple vows of the religious takes the place of the sword used for killing the cow. After that he entrusts himself into the hands of the superior who offers him to God. Then, in His name, the superior accepts him. As in the case of the sacrificial cow, the skin of the 'Sanyasi' should be removed first and then the body should be cut into pieces. By mere profession of the vows, one does not become a perfect 'Sanyasi'. He should be immolated on the sacrificial altar. There, together with Christ, he should offer himself throughout his life." <sup>1</sup> After this exhortation all knelt before the Blessed Sacrament, and prayed for a while. Then Father Gheevarghese and two others,

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, PP. 128-131, Tiruvalla, 1929.



namely, Father Alexios and Deacon Jacob, made their profession. Thus in the Bethany history, the feast of Pentecost in 1920, bore witness to the profession of its first three members. <sup>1</sup>

Mar Ivanios never regarded himself more than an instrument used by God for the establishment of a religious order. He said that it was the will of God to found a religious society; composed of souls consecrated to God; <sup>2</sup> it was the work of Divine Providence. Those who felt the throbbing life of Bethany Institution became aware of the variety of spiritual influences. One might be enthusiastic about its wealth of ideas; another might find a home in which to lead a life of prayer and action. But the observer would soon realize that he had not yet caught sight of the motivating powers of the religious society. Its deepest life-giving source must be recognized in the conviction that the Bethany Movement owed its origin to a special divine intervention. Here, one sees the main spring of the movement, the innermost secret of its vitality. The history of the Bethany Institution itself was the best proof of this Divine Providence, that is, the reunion of Mar Ivanios and his followers. <sup>2</sup> The foundation of Bethany in the Jacobite Church posed spiritual problems for Mar Ivanios. It was the solution of those problems which led him into the Catholic Church. "It was this very congregation", says Dunstan Donova, S. A. "that was to be the nucleus of his return to Rome envisaged by Mar Ivanios". <sup>3</sup>

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, P. 130.

2. Mar Ivanios, *Op. cit.* p. 57.

3. "The Death of Mar Ivanios", in *Unitas II* (1953), P. 49.

The question as to what gave birth to Bethany Asram can be answered by two words which are the most elementary in the Bethany religious vocabulary, namely, prayer and sacrifice. <sup>1</sup> They express the same age-old forces which have sustained and formed God's visible kingdom from the beginning to this day. The history of Bethany Asram also is characterized by a movement of prayer and sacrifice. God, in choosing his instrument, fashions and tempers them for the work. The patterns of Mar Ivanios' austere life were stamped so deeply upon the Bethany monastery.

In the Rule <sup>2</sup> which he had written, Mar Ivanios saw something that he had composed, not according to his own ideas, but according to an idea inspired by Providence and approved by the ecclesiastical authority. Though Bethany had its origin in Serampore, no constitution as such was written until Mar Ivanios and his monks moved to Perunad jungles. The original Constitution was drawn up on August 23, 1919. Here, one must not forget that this Constitution in substance, was already in practice in the preceding years, that is beginning from Serampore. The original Constitution, though drawn up on August 23, 1919, was officially dedicated before the altar on March 9, 1920. It was signed by the following members: Father P. T. Gheevarghese, Father Alexios, later Mar

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1. Cf. *Original Constitution*, P. 1.

2. *Original Constitution*, written on August, 23 1919.

Theodosius, Deacon Yakub, later Mar Theophilos, <sup>1</sup> and Deacon Koshy, later Brother Samuel, C. M. I. <sup>2</sup> The original constitution in content, is a synthesis of the Rule of St. Basil, St. Antony of the Desert, St. Benedict, and St. Francis of Assisi. <sup>3</sup> The original copy of this first constitution is now kept at the Apostolic Internuntiate, Delhi. A true copy of this original constitution is added as an appendix to this study. After the reunion of Mar Ivanios and some of his monks with the Catholic Church – a minority group of Bethany monks is still in the Orthodox Church – many revisions of this original Constitution were made in the Catholic Church under the founder's supervision. Thus we see the constitution followed in Trivandrum and followed in Tiruvalla up to 1931. These are two versions differing

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1. Mar Theophilos was a colleague of Mar Ivanios. He was born in the Jacobite Church. He was the first appointed Novice Master of Bethany in Perunad. In 1929 he was ordained Bishop in the Jacobite Church. On September 20, 1930 he entered the Catholic Church with Mar Ivanios. In 1933 he became the Bishop of Tiruvalla. He died on June 27, 1956.
  2. Deacon Koshy joined the Catholic Church before the reunion of Mar Ivanios took place in 1930. Later he joined the Congregation of the Mary Immaculate.
  3. Cfr. E. Tisserant, *Eastern: Christianity*, P. 158, Calcutta 1958; Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, P. 131; Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, P. 21, Dublin, 1964; The Bethany monks, like St. Antony of the Desert, led an austere life, renouncing all that they were and had; like St. Benedict, they considered manual labour a part of their daily life; like Francis of Assisi, they lived on alms and wandered around preaching the word of God.

only in unimportant details. <sup>1</sup> Then the Constitution of 1938 was drawn up from the two above mentioned versions for the use of both houses, Trivandrum and Tiruvalla. This was in force until 1951, both before and after the reunification of both houses under one superior General.

In 1951 a New Constitution, written by Mar Ivanios, came into existence in place of the one of 1938. <sup>2</sup> Then the Constitution of 1955 was codified according to the prescriptions of the canons of Motu Proprio "Postquam Apostolicis litteris," and approved by the Holy See. <sup>3</sup> Finally necessary changes and adaptations were again made in 1968 according to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

However, one can see that these versions and timely adaptations in no way affected the substance of what Mar Ivanios had written in 1919. The spirit of the original constitution still remains the same. That is to say, that the Bethany rule as it stands today is, in substance, the full and authentic expression of the mind of Mar Ivanios. At the same time, it should be admitted that Mar Ivanios, as a Jacobite has intended Bethany monks to be very monastic and Hindu in their asceticism. But after the reunion, both the lack of diocesan clergy and influences from the western religious groups, diverted it from its original aim, while not in the least impelling its vitality.

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1. After the reunion the monks worked in two dioceses, where they adapted certain customs and regulations that the circumstances demanded.

2. Cfr. Fr. Abraham, *Bethany Asram*, p. 26 (manuscript), B. A.

3. It was approved by the Holy See on April 30, 1955.

## **PART II**

**The Image of Mar Ivanios' Spiritual Life  
as reflected in his Rule**



## CHAPTER I

### **Mar Ivanios' Life Principle, based on His Rule**

In the first part of this study we dealt with the life and works of Mar Ivanios leading upto the foundation of Bethany Asram in the Orthodox Church. There we observed that the formation of Bethany was the result of his desire to 'lead a religious life of an Asram' and 'try to become a saint'. In this second part, our attempt is to examine the real image of his spiritual life based on his rules of the Bethany Institution which he founded. This chapter is particularly dedicated to study his life principle which is nothing else than the Imitation of Christ.

Mar Ivanios' life principle as expressed in the Rules of the Bethany Institution, reads: "the special end of the Congregation (that is, the particular aim of each member of this Congregation) called Imitation of Christ, shall be to imitate as closely as possible through the practice of religious discipline according to these statutes our Lord Jesus Christ, both in His life of prayer and in His life of action, through the adaptation of Indian ways of life".<sup>1</sup> In this single sentence the whole of Mar Ivanios' spiritual life, the sum total of his spirituality, is expressed. It is thus our duty, here to analyse this life principle in order to get

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1. Rules, Chapter 1, No. 2.

into the real image of his spiritual life. As a premise to this study, we shall consider first the place Imitation of Christ occupies in the oriental spirituality to see if Mar Ivanios' spiritual life was according to the oriental spiritual heritage.

The concept of imitation can be considered in a static as well as in a dynamic sense. In a static sense we may apply it to things in general or to persons in 'facto esse', with the meaning of 'resemblance'. When we speak of man in this sense as an imitation of God, we mean man is created after the image of God. In a dynamic sense, to imitate means to try to reproduce that which another person does, namely to take as a model the conduct and actions of another person – "to imitate....to do what is seen to be done by someone else." <sup>1</sup>

Aristotle says: 'to imitate is something innate to man right from his childhood and through this, man differs from other animals'. <sup>2</sup> About a Christian saint John Climacus has the following definition: 'A Christian is an imitation of Christ in a measure that is possible to man in words, actions and thought'. <sup>3</sup>

If therefore imitation is something innate to man, if it is something taken for granted

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1. Cf. Lidell-Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. 9. London, 1966.

2. *Rhet* IV. 1.

3. John Climacus, *Scala Parad.* Grad. I; P. G. 88, 633 B.



for the identity of a Christian, one may not find an abundance of literature about it, one may not find it expressed in many words, because about the most essential things there is the least talk. Air is very essential for living and yet we find so little literature and so little talk about the necessity of air for living. From the relative paucity of expressions on the topic of imitation among the oriental writers, one cannot therefore argue that imitation of Christ is foreign to oriental spirituality. The idea of the imitation of Christ is not the exclusive trait of a particular spirituality either oriental or occidental; it is universal and is the hall-mark of any Christian; it is the actual 'living out' and growth of the Christian life. According to the Fathers of the church, the image of God in which man has been created, ought to grow into assimilation.<sup>1</sup>

With their innate ability to make subtle distinctions the Greeks make the idea of the imitation of Christ very explicit. They speak of man as being the image of God. This image of God in man perfects itself by progressive assimilation to its prototype. It is a conscious imitation or assimilation. They use the word of state "mimema" or the word of action "mimesis" for the concept of man's being an image of God. If the distinction between these two words is not very rigidly adhered to,<sup>2</sup> it shows the

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1. Cf. A Heitmann, *Imitatio dei: "Dei ethische Nachahmung Gottes nach der Vaterlehre der zwei ersten Jahrhunderte"*, *Studia Anselana*, X, Rome, 1940.

2. Cf. Irene Hausherr S. J. "L'imitation de Jesus-Christ dans la spiritualite byzantine", in *Etudes de Spiritualite Orientale* PP. 217-245, Rome, 1969.

equal emphasis the Greeks give to the double aspect of this idea: man is already an image of God from the moment of his creation, but this image has the ontological exigence to perfect itself more and more after its prototype through conscious and progressive imitation. Since God created man with reason and free will, He wants man to respond to Him consciously and freely. Then only it becomes a personal relationship of man with God. The more this personal relationship is achieved the more he will progress in his spiritual life. This spiritual progress was considered a work of grace – a work that is creative because it is real and not merely moral, at the same time it is a supra-creative work in as much as it is deifying or divinising.

The Greek spirituality stresses the aspect of grace working in man but with man. The idea of spiritual quietism is foreign to the Greek; they do not know of a salvation through faith alone without good works. Even in those places where there is question of the role of grace, human co-operation is stressed.’ ‘Through the baptism of regeneration grace confers on us two goods of which one infinitely surpasses the other. The one it (grace) gives us immediately, for it renews us in the water. it makes shine all the features of the soul by wiping out all the wrinkles of sin-it is the image. The other it postpones in order to be effected together with us – it is the similitude. This similitude is the personal relationship with God which is effected through our response to the baptismal vocation. When therefore the intellect begins to taste with great ardour the sweetness of the Holy Spirit, we must understand that the grace begins, so to say, to paint the resemblance upon

the image. after the manner of painters who design first the outline of a man with one colour only, and then joining colour to colour they blend it little by little to produce the figure of the model (in all its particular details) right upto the very hairs; similarly the holy grace of God first of all restores through baptism the image in its state where it found itself at the moment of the creation of man; then later on when it sees us desire with all the ardour of our soul after the beauty of the similitude and training ourselves like intrepid athletes in its arena, then joining to one virtue the flower of another virtue and making to rise from splendour to splendour the beautiful visage of the soul, it (grace) confers upon it (image) the resemblance.<sup>1</sup> Such a collaboration with grace can be considered under various aspects, for example, as conformity to God's will, as the acquisition of virtues etc; but all these have but one model, one norm of life, namely to imitate Christ, who gave us an example of conformity to God's will, of patience, of humility, poverty, self-abnegation etc. We cannot afford to give a detailed exposition of the oriental patristic doctrine on this point. We restrict ourselves to a few references.

W. Volker<sup>2</sup> shows how for Origen, the ideal of perfection consisted in the Imitation of Christ. In his book: 'La Vie Spirituelle d'apres les,

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1. Diadoque de Photice *Centum Capita*, cap. 89, as quoted by Hausherr, op. cit. p. 219.

2. W. Volker, *Das Vollkommenheitsideal des Origenes*, Tubingen, 1931, cf. pp. 215-228.

Peres des trois premiers siecles", G. Bardy has the following words: 'Origen begins by recommending to his disciples the imitation of the Saviour: every Christian ought to form his soul after the image of Christ; it is by imitating Christ that one becomes participant of the divine nature. In fact, it is written that one who pretends to believe in Christ ought to walk as He walked.. Are we not accustomed to believe that Imitation of Christ was the great devotion of the Middle Ages and that the Fathers had almost completely ignored it? In fact, the Fathers never cease to propose to us the example of the Lord'.<sup>1</sup> For the first three centuries, the concept of the Imitation of Christ occupied a very great place; if it had diminished in the later centuries, it was a great deviation from the Christian spiritual heritage and patrimony.

It is however false to say that later periods abandoned the ideal of the Imitation of Christ, so very familiar to the Fathers of the first three centuries. The Byzantine spirituality for example remained true to the Patristic heritage. I. Hausherr<sup>2</sup> in an article brings forward the testimony of three witnesses to the Byzantine spirituality, belonging to three different periods and coming from three different walks of life: the anchorite Isaias, the confessor St. Maximus and Nicola Cabasilas, the champion of sacramental spirituality. For our following remarks we are much indebted to the article of Fr. Hausherr.

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1. G. Bardy, *La Vie spirituelle d'apres des peres des trois premiers siecles*, Paris, 1935, pp. 242 ff.
  2. Irene Hausherr, S. J., "L'imitation de Jesus-Christ dans la spiritualite byzantine" in *Etudes de spiritualite orientale*, Roma, 1969, pp. 217-245

Isaias speaks so often about Imitation that on reading his conferences one gets the impression, as it were of reading the Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis. We have to choose between two imitations – that of Christ or of Adam. God wants that man resembles Him in everything; it is for this that He dwelt among us. Therefore one ought to do that which is according to the nature of Jesus, one ought to arrive at what is according to the nature of God. Nearly all the ancients had defined the good as that which is conformable to the nature and the evil as that which is beside the nature. To steer clear of the difficulties arising from such a system of distinction, <sup>1</sup> Isaias added “of Jesus” to the expression “conformable to the nature.” After sin has perverted our reason, the Lord, out of his great love, took pity on mankind; the Word was made flesh, namely perfect man, similar to us in everything except sin, to restore (bringback) through his holy body, the anti-nature to conformity with nature; moved with pity for man, He made him return to paradise, putting back straight those who walk in His foot-steps. Following Jesus step by step will grant us holiness of soul. This imitation of Christ will make the sons of Adam and Eve become children of God. “Happy is he who with Christ is crucified, dead, buried and raised to newness of life, walking in the holy foot-steps of Jesus, who became man for us, in order that we may resemble– Him through humility, poverty, bearing of injuries and dishonour, so that, freed from all corporal

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1. Difficulties arising from such terminology is discussed by I. Hausherr, op. cit. p. 225-26.

difficulties, we may have peace with all. One who embraces this and wipes off his sins, such a one is according to Christ, child of God and brother of Jesus".<sup>1</sup>

To follow in the foot-prints of Jesus was an expression very dear to Isaias. What Isaias exhorts us to practise by walking in the foot-steps of Jesus is poverty, humility, patient bearing of injuries and affronts to eradicate our pride and vanity. "O wretched man, examine yourself, you have been baptized unto Christ, unto His death; (see) the death He has died, to find out if you walk in His foot-prints. He was impeccable and yet He has presented Himself as a model for you in all His bearings; in poverty but you do not bear poverty; He did not have anywhere to recline His head and yet you do not bear with joy to be a stranger; He has borne injuries and and yet you do not bear any injury at all; He did not repay evil for evil, but you do not bear to receive evil; He was not irritated (annoyed) when He was suffering, but you are irritated (annoyed) even when you make people suffer; He remained untroubled when one injured Him, but you trouble yourself even when one does not trouble you...."<sup>2</sup>

It is in the sense of Imitation that Isaias understands the Pauline expression: "to put on Christ". The supreme object of our imitation is the cross. "To ascend upon the cross of Jesus" was his most

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1. I. Hausherr, *op. cit.* p. 225 ff.

2. Cfr. Hausherr, *op. cit.* p. 228 ff.

favourite expression. In what does this ascension upon the cross of Christ consist and why it is so desirable, Isaias explains at length.<sup>1</sup> The words in which Isaias preaches upon the Passion of Christ are very moving; he uses for example the term: "Our well-beloved Lord God Jesus"-- an expression so full of tenderness and respect. Although devotion to the Passion of the Lord is very ancient and well established, rare are the writers who have such tenderness when meditating on the cross; and this not for sympathising with Christ, but for imitating Him. Only a St. Ignatius of Antioch could surpass Isaias in such a passionate tenderness in the longing after injuries and tribulations. More important than the sentiments is the picture of the cross that we get from Isaias. Through the cross one enters into the repose of the Son of God, the real Sabbath. The cross frees us from the turmoils of sin, passions and evil and brings us to His Sabbath, His repose and rest. Thus in the doctrine of the Imitation of Christ according to Isaias, apathy becomes Christological, attractive and human. The sublime teaching on fraternal charity that we find in Isaias has its source in the imitation of the spirit of Christ, who ascended the cross out of love for men.

St. Maximus the confessor (580-662) is not so passionate like Isaias in elaborating the concept of the Imitation of Christ. His writings are more theoretical and doctrinal and hence less passionate but more developed and profound. When speaking about our attitude towards Christ, the saint

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1. Cf. Hausherr, *op. cit.* pp. 228-230.

speaks often about a conscious and voluntary imitation; this voluntary aspect of the imitation is never excluded nor left aside. We are invited to imitate through our actions the kenosis of the Word,<sup>1</sup> the cross of Christ,<sup>2</sup> etc. He explains what he means by such expressions. Imitation means "to become living images of Christ, or rather one and the same thing with Him, to become the Lord Himself, if so to speak does not seem too strong for some."<sup>3</sup> The idea of living images connotes that it is not something passive, but active participation with grace through imitation.

To follow Christ, to be united with Him, means to will what He wills.<sup>4</sup> He makes the love of God—the loving union of man with God—the goal of human efforts. To reach this union one needs to imitate Christ by practising abnegation against self love, by practising vigilance patience and prayer. Thus through 'praxis', 'theoria' and 'theologia' man reaches that interior peace ('apatheia') and the Holy spirit. That is why he says a Christian ought to concern himself to become another Christ.<sup>5</sup> This general principle is explained and elaborated in all details in his 'Liber Asceticus,' which is a kind of treatise on the Imitation. Those who wish to save themselves ought to keep the commandments; but who can observe all the commandments since they are so many? the one who imitates

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1. Cfr. *P. G.* 91, 505 A.

2. „ „ „ 613 C. D.

3. „ „ „ 1233 D.

4. Cfr. *Opuse. Theol.*, *P. G.* 91, 60 B.

5. „ „ *P. G.* 90, 368 A.



the Lord, the one who walks in His foot-steps can do it; and who can imitate the Lord?; not those who have given themselves over to material cares, but those who have left everything for Christ: only they will receive the power to imitate Him and to observe all the commandments.<sup>1</sup> Hence for Maximus, Imitation of Christ goes hand in hand with observance of the commandments.

Using the term 'model' (typus), which is frequent also in Isaias, Maximus says that Christ has made Himself our model both in the desert and in the inhabited world.<sup>2</sup> The saint has yet another term when speaking of Imitation. "Our Lord has made Himself for the faithful people the authentic exemplar' for a virtuous and divine life."<sup>3</sup> The term "Exemplar" means not merely a model, but the ideal model, the unsurpassable model. For him the purpose of history is Christ and the deification of men—restoring of the spoiled image. In other words, the history of the universe until the coming of Christ is a preparation for God becoming man and the history after Christ is the story of man becoming divine in and through the incarnation of the Word. In this sense Christ became the model, and prototype of a virtuous life; with our eyes fixed on Him, the author of our salvation, we practise the virtues through imitation.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Cfr. *Liber Asceticus*, No. 3, col. 913 B. C.

2. Cfr. *ibidem* No. 5, col. 916 B.

3. *P. G.* 90, 769 A.

4. *Ibidem*

The great virtues of Christ that one has to imitate above all are: Humility and Sweet-Temper.<sup>1</sup> The great humility of Christ, His kenosis, embraced out of love for us, is the one which we ought to imitate in him and which ought to impel us to works of charity for our neighbour. Besides the kenosis which stands at the commencement of the earthly existence of Jesus, there is the Passion and Cross of Jesus at the end of His life; this too must become the object of our imitation.<sup>2</sup> Another way of imitating Christ is through the works of mercy.<sup>3</sup> The imitation of Christ on the cross ought to reach even to the extent of martyrdom.<sup>4</sup>

If at all there is a book which brings out the idea that spiritual life is imitation of Christ, it is the "De Vita in Christo" of Nicolas Cabasilas. With all his simplicity, Cabasilas affirms that between Imitation of Christ and a life in Christ there exists but perfect identity. "To imitate Christ means to live conformed to Him, namely to live in Christ; and this is the work of free will, when it submits itself to the divine wishes".<sup>5</sup>

Since the life in Christ does not conserve itself in us without us, Cabasilas speaks of our co-operation with the divine initiative. This co-operation consists, in the observance of the command-

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1. *P. G.* 90, 889 *D.* 893 *B. C.*

2. *P. G.* 91, 1284 *A. ff.*

3. *Cfr. Epist. XII; P. G.* 91, 505, *A. B.*

4. *Cfr. Epist. XIII; P. G.* 91, 544, *A. B.*

5. *De vita in christo, Liber VII; P. G.* 150, 721 *D.*

ments and to ascertain this, one has to betake oneself to meditation on the life of Christ, especially on the beatitudes, through which Christ promulgated his law. Cabasilas takes each beatitude and proposes to us motives for practising it; and among the motives, there is always the example of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

We could examine still many more authors on the same subject. Just to mention but a couple of them: "Ad Harmonium, quid nomen professione Christianorum sibi velit" and "Ad Olympiummonachum de perfectione et qualem oportet esse Christianum" of St. Gregory of Nyssa deal but about the Imitation of Christ. For fear of making this chapter disproportionately long, we do not intend to proceed further in the study of authors. In general we can say that Greek fathers gave more stress for the imitation of Christ than the Latin fathers. This was based on the difference of their outlook regarding salvation history. For the Greeks following the Johannine writings which attributed salvific significance to the incarnation itself, considered the whole Christevent as salvific. Hence a greater stress to all the different stages of Jesus' life. While the Latin fathers following the Pauline tradition which focussed on Christ's death and resurrection, stressed the paschal mystery. It does not mean that the Latin fathers totally ignored the human life of Jesus, but only a question of stress. For more and abundant number of oriental authors speaking about Imitation of Christ, it would suffice to refer the index

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1. Cf. Hausherr, op. cit. pp. 238-239.

under the word: Christus: Nachahmung, given in the book of Viller and Rahner. <sup>1</sup>

As in everything else, in spiritual life, Imitation of Christ too must follow the golden rule of discretion and prudence. The Fathers of the church warn people against a merely material, external and at times even a ridiculous imitation of the saints. <sup>2</sup> When Michaelis says: "The call for an imitation Christ finds no support in the statements of Paul" <sup>3</sup> he means a sentimental and external imitation, for he says in the same strain: "Fellowship with Christ certainly includes being made like him....one can be an imitator of Christ (mimetes Christou) only by concrete obedience to the word and will of the Lord". <sup>4</sup> The same is echoed in the statement of H. J. Ebeling: "...not imitatio, but conformitas: Christ is no mere example but the ground of the possibility and obligation of such a life." <sup>5</sup> To quote one more New Testament scholar of outstanding renown, R. Bultmann says: "Christ is not an example. He can of course be an example of serving one another...." <sup>6</sup> Thus, the New Testament does not speak of a childish imitation of

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1. M. Viller and K. Rahner, *Azese und Mystik in der Vaterzeit*, Freiburg i. Br. 1939.
  2. Cfr. Hausherr, op. cit., P. 240.
  3. Michaelis on mimeomai, mimetes and summimetes in *TWNT*, IV (ed. by G. Kittel), p. 672
  4. Ibidem, p. 673.
  5. H. J. Ebeling, "Das Messiasheimnis u. d. Botschaft des Marcus-Evangelisten" *ZUW*, *Beih.* 19 (1939) p. 166
  6. R. Bultman, "Die Bedeutung des geschichtlichen Jesus, f. d. Theologie des Paulus", *ThBl*, 8 (1929) p. 147.

Christ. It speaks of carrying on the work of Christ, of being the disciples and witnesses of Christ, of having the same mind of Christ in us. All these do mean following of Christ, but not through an external Imitation which consists in the adoption of the external conduct and traits of another, but through internal imitation which seeks to produce the inner disposition of soul underlying the conduct.

The spiritual writers of the Orient, after the teaching of the New Testament, exhort us not to a childish and external imitation of Christ, but to an interior imitation, namely to have the spirit, and ideals of Christ- "Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus".<sup>1</sup> Now, the sublime inner dispositions of Christ's soul revealed themselves in the great events of His life - the kenosis of the Incarnation, submission to the Father's will, obedience unto death on the cross; and all this for love of God and men. That is why saint Athanasius writes, "the Word became man so that we might be deified"<sup>2</sup> "By becoming man he made us sons to the father and he deified men by himself becoming man"<sup>3</sup> The repeated exhortations of the Oriental Fathers to imitate Christ in His humility, abnegation, Passion, Cross etc. show the nature of the imitation they advocate.

Hence instead of saying that the idea of Imitation of Christ is foreign to oriental spirituality, it would be more true to say that the oriental

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1. Phil. 2. 5.

2. *De Incar.* 54.

3. *Contra Arian.* 1, 38.

spirituality does not advocate a merely external of childish imitation! The idea of the imitation in the Orient comes from the idea of the image of God in man; This image and its growth is essentially a work of God. the human co-operation needed for it is expressed through the practice of virtues through imitation of Christ. In this sense imitation of Christ is subordinate to the divine work of sanctification, but essential in as much as God sanctifies us as free human beings and hence our collaboration with God's grace is very important although subordinate. The famous saying of saint Augustine is note worthy in this respect: "God who created you without you, will not save you without you".

Such a collaboration with the grace of God, through an authentic imitation of Christ is what we find in the spiritual life of Mar Ivanios. His imitation of Christ was not a copying out of external traits of Christ, but imbued with the spirit of Christ, he tried his level best to be another Christ to his fellowmen in the country and milieu of his life.

In order to understand how he collaborated with the grace of God through a genuine and authentic imitation of Christ, we need only to examine his life from beginning to end. Anyone who goes through his life can notice three important stages: first his life upto the foundation of Bethany, from 1882 to 1919; secondly, his solitary life in Perunad forest, from 1919 to 1930; finally the life after his reunion, from 1930 to 1953. In all these stages he, though engaged in different levels of activities, was guided by a supreme goal, which was nothing but the desire for communion

with God, a union with God through Christ in the H. Spirit. For he says "there is nothing more sublime than union with God in this valley of tears." <sup>1</sup> This union with God in the every day life of Mar Ivanios was effected through his unshakeable faith in God, hope in His promises and the unending charity. "In faith", says Mar Ivanios "man should be united to God; in hope he should trust in Him; love of God should be his only vital principle" <sup>2</sup> To make this more clear any number of incidents can be quoted from Mar Ivanios' own life. To cite a few: When Mar Ivanios decided to join the Catholic Church, he had to forsake Bethany, the home which had sheltered him and his followers for eleven years. Thus on August 20th, a strange procession was wending on its way down to the mountain slopes of Perunad. Mar Ivanios, his suffragan Mar Theophilos, eighteen saffran-robed monks and a few orphans at the rear, walked slowly with bent heads. Their eyes were down cast. Each carried a small bundle which contained one change of dress and the material for one meal. The procession of the monks was a spectacular sight which could move even a hard hearted man to a terrain of sympathy. It was a pilgrimage from the Orthodox Church to the Catholic Church under the leadership of Mar Ivanios, like the one from Egypt to the promised land under the leadership of Moses. All were silent due to the sorrowful farewell to their companions. While they were walking, one of the brothers asked the 'Abun' (Mar Ivanios) "Father, where are we going?"

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, p. 56, Tiruvalla, 1929.

2. Ibidem.

because he did not know, where they all were going. Also the other brothers were not told about their destination. The Abun in a gentle voice answered him, "God will provide" <sup>1</sup> For the Abun himself had no clear idea about it. But he had full faith in God that he would provide. He believed that God would not abandon him and his monks. Even his great sufferings caused by his enemies during that period, were not an hinderance to his faith. For, he wrote to one of his friends "I came from the Bethany Hill in the persuit of an ideal. The Asram came with me. I am confident that the good God will guide me" <sup>2</sup>

Another striking example is the one that happened a few days before his death. On one evening Mar Ivanios called his friend Bethany Chackochan, generally known as Manager Chackochan, and asked him to accompany Mar Ivanios for a walk. Chackochan followed him. Mar Ivanios walked towards his tomb and both stood in front of it. Then Mar Ivanios said the following prayer: "My resting place, I am being led to you. Almighty God, allow me not to die in my sins. Almighty and the just Judge, who loveth the sinner and hateth the sins, allow me not to die in my sins; merciful and Almighty God, you have not rejected any one who calls upon you. Thy name be glorified in me. Thy will be fulfilled in me. Glory to you forever". <sup>3</sup> It is needless to mention here that

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1. FR. Bar Slecba, *Bethany History* (Manuscript); B. A.

2. Mar Ivanios' letter to Maman Mappilai: AAT

3. Cfr. *Bethany History* written by K. G. Chackochan, (1969): B. A.



this is a prayer that arose from the bottom of the heart and it reveals his unending confidence and trust in God.

Mar Ivanios' unending love was evidently the primary cause of all the successes he had throughout his life. The same was also the spiritual motive for his reunion. If he was ready to sacrifice everything—honour, wealth, even the Church which nurtured him, it was because of his burning love towards God. He says "I feel God is calling me to offer myself. . . He is pressing me to sacrifice myself. He invites me to leap into the great ocean of his love".<sup>1</sup> He was possessed by the great love of God and it led him to make any sacrifice for the sake of a total union with God.

These are only a few examples that clearly speak of Mar Ivanios' collaboration with the grace of God in imitating Christ.

### **Mar Ivanios' understanding of the Imitation of Christ**

Mar Ivanios' teachings, exhortations, personal prayers, all these bear witness to the same fact that his Imitation of Christ consisted in, not merely copying out the external actions of Christ, but a following that would be an even closer or vital union in spirit with Christ.<sup>2</sup> so that moved by His Spirit and strengthened by His Grace, he, in every circumstances in which he found himself, adopted an attitude that

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1. Cfr. Mar Ivanios' autobiography, (manuscript): AAT.

2. Rules, Chapter 1, No. 2

corresponded to his following of the wishes of His Father. To cite a few examples: “Each member of the Bethany Asram should praise Our Lord Jesus Christ through a perfect and religious observance of the commandments of Our Lord and thereby acquire his perfection and also the perfection of the whole congregation. Thus through prayer, advice, and good examples he will attract many to God”<sup>1</sup>. The one who wants to be close to God”, says Mar Ivanios, “must imitate Jesus Christ in everything—thoughts, words, deeds etc. The self sacrifice shown on Golgotha should be reflected in his own inner life. He must leave not only family and country but himself as well”.<sup>2</sup> Speaking of the Imitation of Christ Mar Ivanios exhorts his monks in the following way, “The Master and Example of Our Religious Institute is Christ. He Himself is the end and means of our perfection. Each one loves and imitates Him; he strives to become another Christ by being united with Him; this is religious perfection. In the thoughts, words, and deeds of a religious there is the zeal and nature of Jesus Christ”<sup>3</sup>

There are other testimonies in the same strain perhaps of greater value, because of their nature as personal prayers. Such are the following prayers which Mar Ivanios often recited: “God, we belong to you; we are set apart for you. To you

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Sanyasa Jivithasahai*, part. I, p. 3, Tiruvalla, 1926.

2. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, P. 56. Tiruvalla, 1929.

3. Mar Ivanios, *Sanyasa Jivithasahai*, Part III, P. 54, Tiruvalla, 1926.

we dedicated, so that you may make use of us according to your will; O Loving Father, teach us to love you with our whole heart, with our whole soul and with our whole strength. Teach us utterly to renounce every selfish thought and dedicate ourselves to you. Teach us to serve you as you desire. Teach us to give ourselves to you. Teach us to give ourselves to you without counting the cost. Teach us to fight for you, no matter what wounds we receive. Let our rewards be to know that we do your Holy Will. Help us to love and glorify you by living the life that you in your infinite love have marked out for us".<sup>1</sup> Again, "O lord", he prays, "you have taught us that where there is Holy Spirit there is freedom. Save from all predicaments, blindness and hindrances, all those whom you have called in your Special love. Grant us the courage and peace to renounce everything and to put the trust in you and follow you. Let no earthly trials separate us from you. Grant us the Grace that we may ever remain in you."<sup>2</sup>

To conclude, we have analysed so far the place of Imitation of Christ in the Oriental spirituality. Further on, our analysis of the life of Mar Ivanios showed that he too stands in the line of the oriental spiritual teachers.

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, pp. 71-72, Tiruvalla, 1929.

2. Ibidem. P. 122.

### **Imitation of Christ consists in following Christ's Life**

Having explained the formula 'Imitation Of Christ' and Mar Ivanios' life and understanding of it, we now come to examine in what this Imitation of Christ consists according to him. In the following pages we will see that for Mar Ivanios it consisted in the following of Christ's life of prayer and action.

According to Mar Ivanios, christian and religious perfection should consist in imitating Christ both in his life of prayer and life of action. This is the ideal which he proposes right at the beginning of his Constitution: "The special end of the Congregation shall be to imitate, as closely as possible.....our Lord Jesus Christ both in His life of Prayer and His life of action....".<sup>1</sup> Then after explaining the factors of this life of prayer and life of action, Mar Ivanios continues. "In this way the members of the congregation imitate our Lord Jesus Christ both interiorly and exteriorly".<sup>2</sup> Mar Ivanios proposed this ideal to his followers not merely through the letters of the Rules. but through the eloquent example of his life. This feature of his spiritual life is very well reflected in his everyday life. Thus he could say to his followers like saint Paul: "Be ye imitators of me as I am of Christ".

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1. Rule, Chapter 1 No. 2.

2. Ibidem.

## Mar Ivanios' Prayer life

In order to imitate Christ in His life of prayer, Mar Ivanios follows certain religious practices. They are clearly expressed in his Rules; "The factors of the life of prayer are the sacred Liturgy, the Divine Praise or Divine Office, the spiritual reading, meditation, examen of conscience, the reception of the sacraments of penance and divine Eucharist, silence, holy recollection, common life etc. All these are means to foster habitual union with God".<sup>1</sup> The implication which Mar Ivanios makes here is that, as Christ's life, which was a life of intimate union with the Father, overflowed in prayer, the monks, imitating Christ's example, should unite themselves with the Father by prayer.

Following this example of Our Lord whose whole life, beginning from his Incarnation up to his death on the Cross, was a continuous life of prayer, Mar Ivanios arranged his life of prayer in the wilderness of Perunad. He spent long hours of prayer in that forest. "He rose at midnight to chant the Divine Office".<sup>2</sup> Prayer life played a great role in Mar Ivanios' earthly life. About his prayer life in Perunad, he himself gives the following account "By means of prayer, meditation, Examen of conscience, confession, Holy Mass and communion, practice of presence of God, mortifications, good intentions, and practice of Christian virtues, we, myself and other monks, lived in Christ Jesus".<sup>3</sup> "The austere humble life", says Fr.

1. Rules, Chapter 1; No. 3.

2. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios'* Chapter 7, p. 32, Dublin, 1962.

3. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, p. 126, Tiruvalla, 1929.

Gabriel” of Mar Ivanios and his followers in the Perunad forest attracted the people of the neighbouring villages. Their prayers and their fast drew the spiritually starved laity to the sanctity of this abode...soon people were flocking to Perunad in thousands to steep themselves in the deep spirituality they found there. During Lent temporary sheds had to be erected to accomodate the tens of thousands gathered there to hear the retreats and to take part in the exquisitely performed liturgical services”.<sup>1</sup>

Mar Ivanios’ reunion with the Catholic church later, only added new impetus to his prayerful and mortified life as evidenced by his later writings. For example, in one of his letters during the Lenten season in 1932 he wrote to a sister about the necessity of practising mortification and penance. “A thousand holy practices,” he advised “that you may observe daily will not avail you to attain sanctification and perfection if you do not conquer—and really and fully—those evil passions of self-seeking, false pride, irreverence, disobedience, mutual spite, proneness to irregularity and slovenliness, irritability and many other domestic thieves that lurk within yourself. These thieves may all be comprised under one name - insolence of the mind, self-exaltation. This is the reason for practising “mortification of the interior”. Mortification of the exterior senses as well as of the interior passions is very very necessary”.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Fr. Gabriel, *Eastern Churches, Quarterly*, Autumn, 1955.

2. Mar Ivanios’ letter to Sister Basim, S. I. C., dated 9th Feb. 1932: B. A. For the whole letter, see Appendix V.

Mar Ivanios' prayer life was closely connected with fasting. Quoting Mark 9:29: "This can go out by nothig but prayer and fasting", he formulated a rule for himself and for his followers, insisting on the great necessity of fasting. <sup>1</sup> According to him, fasting is absolutely necessary in order to fight against the hostile forces, to repulse all the attacks of the demons and to practise virtue. <sup>2</sup> As the best example in this matter, he sees Christ Himself, who, before beginning His public life, fasted for forty days and forty nights in the desert. <sup>3</sup> He understood that the motive force of Christ's fasting was nothing but to leave an example to His followers and to teach them the necessity and importance of this exercise, since Christ, being God, needed no ascetism. Thus, like the great Master, Mar Ivanios set an example of solid spirituality to his followers.

At the same time Mar Ivanios pointed out that excessive fasting and austerity are a great hindrance to prayer, and so is no fasting at all. In an exhortation to his followers, he explains that the object of fasting is not to enfeeble the body, but to give health to the soul. Therefore, he advises them to obey them who have the rule over them and to submit to there decisions. <sup>4</sup>

As in the early church, fasting was of extreme importance to these Syrian monks. It

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1. Rules (1931 Ed.) p. 4; Rules (1951 Ed.) Chapter 17, Nos. 4, 5.

2. Rules, (1931 Ed.) PP. 4, 5.

3. St. Luke 4. 2.

4. Exhortation to the Bethany Sisters on March 28. 1928; B. A.

always signified penance, but penance as part of their public worship of God, part of their liturgical life. On the fast days. <sup>1</sup> Mar Ivanios and his followers observed rigorous fasting. They did not consume any food until noon or three o' clock in the afternoon, for example, on Good Friday. At a later time, Mar Ivanios made these rules less difficult by limiting this rigorous fasting to be obligatory to his monks, only during Lent and the three days fast. <sup>2</sup>

Concerning Mar Ivanios' devotion to the rite of fasting, Margaret Gibbons cited an incident that impressed itself on a group of non-Christian people. She says: "The Archbishop was engaged in mission work all morning in a rural locality. Towards mid-day, some kindly Hindu families prepared a dainty lunch and carried it to him in the make-shift chapel which had engaged his energies for many hours. It was a day of ritual fast and, of course, the Hindu neighbours did not know it. He smiled when they set the rich food before him and explained simply the situation. Then he blessed the food and the kindly benefactors, and asked that the poorest people in the neighbourhood should be brought in to take his place at the table." <sup>3</sup>

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1. The Orthodox Church in Malankara (Kerala) observed seven fasting Seasons: Lent, Advent, Fast before Assumption, 3 days fast, the Fast of the Apostles, Fast before Pentecost, Fast before the Nativity of Our Lady. Besides these, every Wednesday and Friday were considered fasting days. For details, see the *Christian Liturgical Year* by Mar Ivanios, PP. 92-96, Tiruvalla, 1926.

2. Rules (1931 Ed.) P. 5, Tiruvalla, 1931.

3. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chapter 17, P. 104, Dublin, 1962.



During Lent, Holy Week, as a whole, was characterized by prayer and vigil. In Bethany at Perunad where Mar Ivanios and his monks lived, thousands of people assembled there during Holy Week to pray, do penance, and observe fasting together with the monks<sup>1</sup> The monks spent, the last three days of the week in severe fasting and prayer. From Thursday until Sunday they did not eat at all, except to consume some special kind of bread made to commemorate the Last Supper or "Kanji", i. e., rice cooked with water, Good Friday was a day of mourning for them. The Whole Friday night, the father and the disciples (Mar Ivanios and the monks) spent in church praying and meditating on the passion of our Lord. The faithful joined them in silence.<sup>2</sup> Fast also implied abstinence from fish, meat, eggs, milk and milk products and alcoholic drinks. On Wednesdays and Fridays they abstained from meat, fish, eggs, milk, etc.<sup>3</sup> In addition to all these fasts and abstinences, Mar Ivanios and the monks used to observe fasts and abstinence on personal initiative and for private devotion. Nevertheless, all these were legitimately permitted by the superior<sup>4</sup>

While imitating Christ in His interior life by prayer and penance, Mar Ivanios occupied his inner self with a continual contemplation of the

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, P. 113, Tiruvalla, 1929.

2. *Ibidem* P. 112.

3. Mar Ivanios, *The Christian Liturgical Year*, P. 91, Tiruvalla, 1926.

4. Rules, (1951 Ed.) Chapter 14, c. 3.

action and the passion of Christ. By an inner dwelling on His passion, he became so inflamed with the fire of divine love that he wrote many addresses on the life of Christ. In one of his addresses, for example, he presented the life-of Christ as a medicament of our salvation. He says, "The entire incarnate life of the Lord Jesus was to prepare the medicament necessary for our salvation. With this medicament we can be successful in all our trials and temptations. The medicament suited to each one's illness is found in this medicament-pot. This medicament-pot is the body of the Crucified Christ. This pot has many taps – in the Sacred Heart, on the Sacred feet, and on the Sacred hands. From any of these, one can get medicine and be healed. One thing, however, is to be kept in mind:—it is like eating the Indian gooseberry that is, at first bitter and only then does it become sweet." 1

Thus, in quiet solitude in the silence of the Perunad Forest, Mar Ivanios communed with God through a life of prayer and penance, and he reminded his followers saying that "even in the midst of exterior occupations they should try to raise their hearts to God and remain continuously united with Him by means of frequent ejaculations and the exercise of the presence of God." 2 Moreover, he often prayed to the Lord of the harvest to call many zealous people who would willingly lead such a life of prayer based on charity. "Lord", he prayed, "the harvest is great indeed, but the labourers are few; call many religious

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1. *Retreat Address*, by Mar Ivanios, April 17, 1927; B. A.

2. *Rules*, Chapter, 13, c. 3.

men and women to gather up your harvest. Give us plenty of holy men and women who will glorify you through their prayerful lives and virtuous deeds and thus reveal to the world your holiness and love. Father, let your holy name be sanctified above all upon earth." <sup>1</sup>

### **Imitation of Christ in His Action!**

In the salvation-history of mankind, Jesus Christ, the Saviour, the Redeemer of mankind, had also to play a very active part, a very busy life. The gospel accounts are filled with praise for his actions. Numerous miracles, for example, were performed by Christ. Some of these miracles, to name a few, are: "The Healing of the Ten Lepers;" <sup>2</sup> "Multiplication of Loaves;" <sup>3</sup> "The Exorcism of Two Demoniacs." <sup>4</sup> St. Peter put into a nut shell what Jesus did during His life. He put the matter into five short words: "Jesus went about doing good." Easily and self-consciously Christ moved among the dregs of His society, prostitutes, tax extortionists. Healing and helping people out of chasms of despair, counseling them in their crises, He went about doing it with such single-mindedness and effectiveness. That is what Mar Ivanios also did; this is what he had in mind when he exhorted the monks to imitate Christ in His action, that is to say, to follow the example of Christ, by participating and continuing His salutary works. He explicitly says that "the characteristic devotion of the Bethany con-

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, PP. 60-61, Tiruvalla, 1929.

2. St. Luke, 17, 12-19.

3. St. Mathew, 15, 32-39.

4. St. Mathew, 8, 28-34.

gregation is the devotion to Our Lord as a missionary.”<sup>1</sup> He continues, “thus the zeal for the salvation of souls especially for the reunion of our separated brethren shall be the distinguishing feature of the monk’s spirituality.”<sup>2</sup> In this, Mar Ivanios’ life itself was the best example to his brethren.

The works of active life can be spiritual, directly bearing on the soul, that is, preaching missions and retreats, etc., or temporal, that is, teaching, nursing social works, and the like. Mar Ivanios worked on all these levels. He was a good missionary, a well-known retreat preacher, and an excellent social worker. Upon his death,<sup>3</sup> one of the leading daily newspapers gave the following remark on him: “The standing pride of the Malankara Jacobite Church, a social leader, a man acknowledged by the community, given to self-sacrifice, a courageous, person who exerted immense effort to establish peace in the community....., founder of the Bethahy Asram (Order of the Imitation of Christ), convent and orphanage, a man of service, a renowned speaker, a generous and great-souled person.....: a martyr through diverse loss and disgrace in the cause of welfare service; in these, and many other ways, Archbishop Mar Ivanios was well known not only to the ‘Malayalees’ but also to many a scholar in other countries, such as Bengal, Russia,

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1. Rules, Chapter, 13 c:3.

2. Ibidem

3. M. Ivanios died on July 15, 1953.

England, Germany, America, etc.”<sup>1</sup> This is not an high eulogy indeed. Because it is deserved, and for an Indian christian, sepecially for a Malayalee christian it is an especial pleasure to think of Mar Ivanios' period of flourishing of faithfuls in Kerala.

The early twentieth century was marked by the urgent need for a spiritual revival in the orthodox church in Kerala, South India. Lawsuits, as we have seen in one of the previous chapters, had resulted in a general decline in fevour and the spiritual life of the faithful had touched a low level. People had grown careless in their religious duties; their faith had become cold and lifeless. It was at this time that Mar Ivanios was beginning his service in it. During his seminary life he prepared himself for an active mission work by writing sermons and preaching retreats. He had taken the promise: “I vow to dedicate my life to the spiritual uplift of the community that gave me birth.”<sup>2</sup> Even before his sacerdotal ordination, we see him going out into the villages ad byways where he conducted missions and spiritual conferences.<sup>3</sup> During his stay at Serampure he prepared labourers for the preaching of the Gospel— “to go about the parishes preaching missions, to find solutions for the spiritual problems of the people, to create a religious attitude in children by teaching them catechism, to proclaim the

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1. Daily Newspaper, *Deepika*, quoted by T. Inchakalody in *X'ray of Malankara Church*, PP. 4-5.

2. M. Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chapter 3, p. 10, Dublin, 1962.

3. Inchakalody, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, Chapter 5, PP. 51-52.

Gospel among the infidels....”<sup>1</sup> But everything was for the greater glory of God.

Following the example of the missionary Christ, Mar Ivanios, while in Perunad Forest, went out to the far villages occasionally to preach the word of God. Like Francis of Assisi, he walked through a road of poverty and obedience to the divine will. There, he reunited families who were separated for various reasons, such as, living apart by means of a marital separation, not living together because of a self-imposed divorce, living in different places because of family misunderstandings; etc. He was a messenger of peace and love for all those who came in contact with him. He did all this and even more, He promoted the liturgy by encouraging people, both old and young, to attend daily and Sunday Masses and by developing in them a love for the church. He taught them to think with the church and above all to live as faithful children of the mother church. He also promoted family devotions by encouraging families to say morning and evening prayers together, to say private novenas for their own individual intentions, to take pride in personal prayer, etc. He and his followers instructed both pagan and Christian children and adults in catechetics. In order to help him in the missionary activities, he founded, as we have seen, another religious institute for women, called “Sisters of the Imitation of Christ.”<sup>2</sup> The members of this institute follow their founder by striving to attain the twofold end through a life of prayer and action in their daily lives.

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*. P. 51, Tiruvalla, 1929.

2. Foundation of the Bethany convent: on September 8, 1925.

Besides this, he also founded a Third Order Secular called Tertiary.<sup>1</sup> The members of this organization lived in their own houses and followed certain rules regarding prayer and action. They spread the life of perfection through prayer and action among people of all walks of life. This Third Order was affiliated with Bethany Asram.

The missionary zeal of Mar Ivanios was so great that he preached the Gospel to the people of India, to the people in all walks of life, without any distinction of caste or colour. He had the missionary zeal of saint Paul who exhorts Timothy to preach the Word in season and out of season.<sup>2</sup> It was also his aim to improve the religious and social welfare of many thousands of depressed classes.<sup>3</sup> To achieve this goal, he established mission centers in many places.<sup>4</sup> These depressed classes were the aboriginal races, down-trodden for centuries by the cruel hands of caste and customs. They were poverty-stricken, ill-clad, and living unclean lives in miserable huts. They had no education or any knowledge of hygienic rules. They indulged in the worship of devils and carried to extreme superstition, loose morality, and drinks. Mar Ivanios and his companios made an earnest and sincere effort to improve the conditions of these truly unfortunate people. He was not satisfied with the

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1. Cf. Mar Ivanios sermon at the time of his consecration: T. Inchakalody, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios* Part. I, pp. 158-159, Trivandrum, 1957.

2. II Timothy 4:2

3. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, P. 138, Tiruvalla, 1939.

4. Ibidem, P. 139.

mere preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. He went about visiting huts and conducting meetings. He visited the sick and brought medicine to them. As a result of all this, hundreds of low caste people—Pulayas, Kuravas,<sup>1</sup> and Pariahs,<sup>2</sup> who were exploited by the rich—were brought to the baptismal font every year.<sup>3</sup> The specific missionary activities that were exercised by Mar Ivanios in imitation of Christ's life of action, are written in his Rule to the Bethany Monks. Thus, he says: "The life of action which is centered around the spread of the Gospel; comprises the following: (a) Doing mission work, chiefly among our separated brethren; (b) Preaching missions and retreats as well as conducting conferences, chiefly in non-Catholic centers; (c) Conducting education institutions for the education of youth; collegs, technical institutes, etc. (d) Carrying on the apostolate of press (e) Taking up parish works as the need of the eparchy requires, without prejudice to the religious discipline."<sup>4</sup>

It is to be confessed here, that it was this missionary spirit of Mar Ivanios that finally brought him to the Catholic Church. He himself considered it as a special blessing given to him for his earnest desire to effect and realize the holy will of Christ "that all may be one".<sup>5</sup>

By his reunion with the Catholic Church in 1930, Mar Ivanios active life entered a new phase. His active life met with new vivaciousness and his prayer life became more involved in the service to his unfortunate neighbour.' By preaching missions and retreats, and conducting conferences, he enlightened the

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1. These are labourers in the Paddy fields.

2. They are basket and mat makers.

3. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, P. 138, Tiruvalla, 1929.

4. Rules. Chapter 1, No. 2.

5. St. John 17:11



the minds of several people, both non-Catholics and non-Christians. As a result, within one year, about five thousand people accepted the true faith.<sup>1</sup> "The conversions", wrote Mar Ivanios in his annual report of 1931; "of pagans and schismatics in this country to our Holy Faith is the task to which, trusting in the mercy of Our Lord and the blessing of the Holy Father, I am devoting myself.... Since my submission to the Holy Faith, thirty-six priests, eight of them Regular and others Secular, have been received into our Holy Church from Jacobite Schism..... In the Diocese of Bethany alone forty-three mission stations have been received into the Catholic Church."<sup>2</sup>

In twenty-three years of his active life in the Church, Mar Ivanios received several thousand people, from all walks of life, ranging from poor peasants to political leaders, into the true fold. Bishops priests, and clerics were impressed by his self sacrificing services for the salvation of souls and finally, they followed him.<sup>3</sup> Thus when he died in 1953 he was the shepherd of 62,123 faithful people.<sup>4</sup> But in all these he considered himself only an instrument used by God. "...with folded hands" he said lying on his death cot, "I thank the mighty power of the All-merciful for using me, His weak instrument for the accomplishment of His work....."<sup>5</sup>

1. Thangalathil Ignatius, O. I. C., op. cit. P. 270.

2. Mar Ivanios, in the *Report on the Diocese of Bethany of the First Year*: A.A.T.

3. Mar Ivanios received into the Catholic Faith, Bishop Mar Severios in 1937, Bishop Mar Dioscoros in 1937, besides several priests and clerics of minor orders.

4. Cf. *The Ecclesiastical Province of Trivandrum*(Calendar), 1953.

5. Mar Ivanios' last message to his people, written on September 21, 1952.

This chapter would not be complete without reference to Mar Ivanios' idea with regard to the relation between prayer and action. When he decided to imitate Christ his intention was to follow Him who united His life of prayer and action in Himself.<sup>1</sup> Christ's life of prayer and action were certainly not two separate states of life independent of each other, but, they were only two facets of the very existence of Christ that was wholly for God and for man. That is to say, in the earthly life of Christ prayer and action are seen simultaneously complementing each other; like the two sides of the same coin; when His life of prayer led Him to action. His life of action brought Him to prayer. His active life was an external outflow of His Prayer life. Following this life of Christ Mar Ivanios tried in his daily life to join those two modes of spiritual life into a harmonious and organic unity. If he spent the day in charitable works, during the night he communed with the Eternal Truth. "Abun"<sup>2</sup> says one of his companions, "during the night he would be quietly lost in contemplation, sometimes lying prostrate with arms extended, thus making himself a living cross".<sup>3</sup> His ultimate goal of this was certainly a loving union with God which he would attain through a loving service to the neighbour. Mar Ivanios' companions also followed their 'abun' who united an active and prayer life in himself and who always exhorted them, "let all be saints—who follow Christ so closely that we may bring others

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1. Rules, Chapter 1, No. 2.

2. After the foundation of Bethany, Mar Ivanios was called 'Abun', a Syriac name meaning 'our father'.

3. Abraham O. I. C., op. cit., p. 16.

to God".<sup>1</sup> His constant prayer was, "O Lord Jesus Christ, look with compassion upon those who renounce the world in order to follow you. Deign to save them from all perils that they face in life's battle fields. Liberate from every blindness and hinderence all those whom you have lovingly chosen for a dedicated life. Set them to diffuse in the entire world the Sweet Odour of Your Love through their prayer and charitable works. Confirm in them the good will to embrace hardships as clothing for the body, and poverty as a wreath for the head. Be Your image always shine forth in their hearts"<sup>2</sup> Thus here we see Mar Ivanios' earnest desire for the fine blending of a life of prayer and action in all those who promised to follow Christ who combined these two lives in Himself.

Mar Ivanios' idea on uniting these two lives in one's daily life can be seen again from the fact that he introduced the historical Bethany family into Bethany Rule, He says, "A Bethany monk is a member of the Order of the Imitation of Christ. With his heart, he should love and imitiate our Lord Jesus Christ. As a means to fulfilling this obligation the name of Bethany is helpful. Bethany is a family that loved Jesus Christ. Like Mary of Bethany, the Bethany monks should lead a life of prayer; like Martha of Bethany, they must lead a life of service, and like Lazuarus, a life of missionary activities, motivated by the love of God".<sup>3</sup>

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1. Cf. Margaret Gibbons, *op. cit.* p. 123.

2. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, p. 57, Tiruvalla, 1929.

3. Rules (1931 ed.) pp. 1,2. This is the first printed Rules in a summarised form, in which the spiritual life of the Bethany institution is explained.

We see a number of groups participating together with the Son of Man in the drama of salvation. From them all, Mar Ivanios chose only these saints of Bethany family to be the models in the following of Christ. This is because Mar Ivanios viewed that, like Mary of Bethany, who did not want to leave her divine Guest even for a moment, and thus remained near Christ, attentive to His words, the Bethany monks should lead a life of prayer by uniting themselves with Christ in contemplation; like Martha at the same time, who was busy attending to his wants, they should serve their fellow men through charitable works; and moreover, like Lazarus who dedicated his life in preaching word of the Master, they should work for the extension of the kingdom of God upon earth and the redemption of all men through their missionary activities.<sup>1</sup> This was what Mar Ivanios was aiming at and in this he himself became a model to his followers.

To conclude this chapter we may summarise what we said about Mar Ivanios' Imitation of Christ: a) According to Mar Ivanios Imitation of Christ consists in the actual following of Christ's life, both his prayer and active life. b) Mar Ivanios in his personal life tried his best to follow Him through prayer and action. c) In His Imitation Mar Ivanios earnestly desired to follow Christ by uniting his life of prayer and action as far he could.

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1. Rules (1931 ed ) pp. 1,2 and Rules (1955 ed.) chap. 1, pp 1,2; Fr. Abraham O. I C. *Bethany Asram*, pp. 4-5 (Manuscript); Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, p. 69, Tiruvalla, 1929.

## CHAPTER II

### **The Deciding Factor In Mar Ivanios' Reunion**

Mar Ivanios founded his Bethany Asram in the Orthodox Church with the intention of following Christ's life through religious practices. However, his religious life in the Orthodox Church proved that his aspiration could not be fully realized in that Church. Moreover his further studies and observations led him to the conclusion that the true Church established by Christ was the Catholic Church and that he should be united with her for the realization of his ambition. And it resulted in Mar Ivanios' reunion with the Catholic Church: In this chapter our attempt is not to give an exposition of the history of Mar Ivanios' reunion, but to show that the motivating force for his reunion was ultimately connected with his personal and spiritual life.

The foremost intention which Mar Ivanios had in his life was to raise himself to the stature of a saint in the religious life of an Asram. <sup>1</sup> with this idea in mind, he founded Bethany in the Orthodox Church. However his life in Bethany faced many spiritual problems that touched his conscientious life. For example, as the time approached for him to

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1. Mar Ivanios, *op. cit.* p. 10

bind himself with the vows of religious life, he became very apprehensive over the thought of to whom he should owe obedience, because the authority in his church was divided and two rival groups made contrasting claims for it. Dr. Placid writes. "The question as to whom the vow of obedience to be made by the religious was to be directed, caused Father Gheevarghese, later Mar Ivanios, some anxiety about the position of his Church to which he belonged.<sup>1</sup> Though Mar Ivanios solved the problem of religious obedience by establishing Bethany independently,<sup>2</sup> the question of authority in the Church remained unsolved for him. Thereupon he engaged himself in the study of the origin of the Church. He asked the advice of the theologians, ecclesiastical authority, and day and night he prayed God for the necessary light. However it took him many years to discover the position of the Jacobite Church to which he belonged. He found that his aspirations could not be realized in his Church and whatever he did there for it, was simply building on sand. He says, "The Holy Spirit taught me and my brother Bishop Mar Theophilos and religious Congregations of monks and sisters that God guided me to find that perfection of humility and religious obedience were impossible of attainment in the Jacobite Church.....we discovered that all the work we did in the Jacobite Church was simply building on sand".<sup>3</sup> Then onwards reunion with

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1. Dr. Placid C. M. I. "The Syro-Malankara Reunion", *Unitas* Vol. VII, No. 1.

2. Mar Ivanios, *Bethany Yogam*, p. 6. Tiruvalla, 1930.

3. Mar Ivanios' letter to His Beatitude Ignatius Elias, Patriarch of Antioch; AAT. For the whole letter, see Appendix II.

the Catholic Church became for him the ideal that inspired and motivated all his actions.

Mar Ivanios became convinced that Our Lord founded only one Church and that was the Catholic Church to which all faithful are to be united. He had declared this conviction both in his speeches and writings on numerous occasions. In the second memorandum sent to Rome, Mar Ivanios speaks of three considerations which in his mind, had great weight and cogency and which impelled him to seek reunion. The first of these deals with the necessity of unity in the Church. "The conviction that it is the will of Our blessed Lord that all Christians should be united, and that the sooner the reunion is effected the better for the glory of Our Blessed Saviour. The present condition of the Christian world cannot but break the heart of any person who desires to love our blessed Lord." Moreover, he saw separation in a deeper spiritual sense as a wound in the body of Christ, which he was called upon to heal as far as it lay in his power. That is why he wrote to the Bethany fathers, "Even if I were to be cut into a thousand pieces, in order to heal a small wound in the body of Christ, I feel it should be done".<sup>2</sup>

Mar Ivanios did not leave any stone unturned in order to heal the wounds in the body

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1. Cfr. Second Memorandum sent by Mar Ivanios to Rome on 22-1-1927, AAT.

2. Mar Ivanios' letter to Bethany fathers at Vennikulam, 1927, B. A

of Christ. He implored the Catholicos of Malankara and the Patriarch of Antioch to join him in his efforts to heal the wounds in so far as it lay in their power. He wrote to the Jacobite Patriarch, "May I on bended knees implore Your Beatitude to consider this true doctrine which is clearly set forth in the Sacred Scriptures....and to ask Our Divine Saviour for the Grace of humility of heart which alone can give the light to see, and the strength to obey the will of God and to enable you to make the submission to His Holy Will and heal the wounds in His body. If only your Beatitude will consider the matter, I am confident that divine Grace will not fail you. For, the reunion of Christendom is God's Holy Will. There are two schisms which Your Beatitude can heal by a single act. The first of these is primarily concerned with your own people in Syria and Turkey. It is a great schism which took place in the East in the middle of the fifth century when the followers of Eutychus and Dioscoros disobeyed the Universal Church and repudiated the Pope and the Eccumenical Council of Chalcedon. Although the Jacobites anathematized Eutychus later, the schism was nevertheless continued to this day.

The second is one that is confined to the Christians of St. Thomas in Malabar. In the seventeenth century a section of these Christians revolted against the Catholic Church and went into schism for merely personal and social reasons. This schism had nothing to do with faith and dogma. Later on the separated Christians of St. Thomas accepted the supremacy of the Jacobite Patriarch and thus nominally became Jacobites. The immediate cause of



this schism was a slander that the Portuguese had drowned a Bishop coming to Malabar from the East, This Bishop was not a Jacobite and was not sent here by the Jacobite Patriarch. . . . . Providence has called Your Beatitude to your present position. I believe the Holy Spirit invites Your Beatitude to surrender yourself entirely to His guidance and forsake your schism and enter into the unity of the Catholic Church by confessing the entire Catholic faith and making your submission to the Pope the one centre of unity for Christendom. The Church of Christ is one and indivisible, one in faith, one in organization one in unity of his life as manifested interiorly in her mystical union with her bridegroom, and exteriorly in the corporal sacramental unity that subsists among the members of the visible Church, establishing them into the one kingdom of God upon earth. The Pope, the Vicar of Christ the King, guides and rules the entire Church on earth with the joyful co-operation and the loyal support of all the Patriarchs, Archibishops and Bishops, who constitute the hierarchy of the Catholic Church”<sup>1</sup>

While Mar Ivanios was busy with his preparation, he was also mobilizing his Religious Community for the reunion. He was so enthusiastic in his attempt to convince them of the need of the reunion that he spent much of his time trying to accomplish this through preaching and conferences. On one such occasion he said to the Bethany Sisters “Our reunion with the Catholic Church is a spiritual journey towards Christ. So far we were far away from Christ, in

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1. Mar Ivanios' letter to His Beatitude Ignatius Elias: see Appendix II

the sense that we did not belong to His fold. In our reunion with the true fold we will be given the Grace to reach Him. In order to make our journey to Christ easier, we have the eternal food, the Eucharist".<sup>1</sup> Here one may notice Mar Ivanios' desire to be united with Christ in His Church in order to attain his salvation. For this he observed, union with the Catholic Church, which is the mystical Body of Christ, is a sine qua non. His desire to make this union possible and realized, urged him to introduce the prayer of the Church Unity Octave into his congregation. He says, "the movement of the Church Unity Octave sponsored by Father Paul Wattson, was known to me at that time..... I observed it in the monastery and the Convent of nuns which I founded in the Jacobite Church without any personal knowledge of or correspondence with Fr. Paul. A daily prayer for the reunion of Christendom was introduced by me in my religious communities. God answered this prayers and guided us all to seek communion with the Holy See".<sup>2</sup> Mar Ivanios' followers also desired to have this reunion realized as early as possible. One of the first members of Bethany Asram writes, "We wanted to be united with all the religious of the world, instead of living isolated in a small community. Our souls desired the union of all the faithful redeemed with the Blood of Christ. Division we felt is sin. We also thought that our religious would have a more firm foundation in the Catholic Church, where so many religious Orders and

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1. Mar Ivanios' exhortation to Bethany sisters on July 24, 1930, B. A.

2. Mar Ivanios' letter to Fr. Ganonon October 4, 1950, AAT.

Congregations flourish. These and similar thoughts forced us interiorly to press Mar Ivanios to speed up the attempt at union and to give him moral and spiritual support".<sup>1</sup>

Everything that has been mentioned above points to the fact that when Mar Ivanios discovered that he was not in the true Church of Christ, he desired to be united as early as possible with her in order to follow Christ's life in His Church. Here one can see that the real motive of Mar Ivanios' reunion with the Catholic Church was ultimately his own spiritual life. Mar Ivanios reiterated the same facts in his numerous discourses and speeches after his reunion. Many journalists visited and gathered around Mar Ivanios, after his reunion in 1930, asking various kinds of questions which treated all phases of his life. Every one desired to get a detailed report of his reunion. To the one who asked him, "What prompted Your Grace to take the final step"?, he replied in this way: "The painful realization of the sinfulness of schism. The Jacobite Church is one of those separated bodies which broke away from the unity of the Church in the early centuries. I knew the fulness of the Catholic doctrine, and yet I found myself unable to realize it in the separated Church. This was because of grave mental anxiety. The Catholic Church being the home of the Holy Spirit upon earth, I felt that to remain in schism with her was a grave sin. Divine Providence led me, step by step almost imperceptably until at last I found

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1. Fr. Abraham O. I. C. *Bethany Asram*, p. 23 (Manuscript).

myself in the Catholic Church".<sup>1</sup> Mar Ivanios had the feeling that to be in the Jacobite Church was sin. This reveals his spiritual consciousness. On the other hand, he felt that Catholic Church is the true home of the Holy Spirit whose help is absolutely necessary for the realization of his aspiration. Again, on the Catholic Church he says, "The Catholic Church is the only true and perfect embodiment of historical christianity a religion that Jesus Christ brought into world. Again, there are forces at work in the modern world that attempt to shake human society to its foundations. My studies and observations have led me to the conclusion that the Catholic Church is the only institution that has in the past withstood and forever withstand successfully the onslaught of these disruptive forces". "Will your Grace kindly explain further these Points"., asked Dr. Panjikaran. "My studies", answered Mar Ivanios, "on the origin and the history of the Catholic Church and particularly of the beneficial results it has produced in society in general and in the lives of the saints, ancient and modern, in particular, led me to this conclusion. The concept of the Catholic Church as the living organ of Christ finds its practical expression in all its aspects only in that Church. She alone fulfills the purpose for which God became man, namely the salvation of individuals and of society. She alone is the 'mystical body of Christ' on earth. In her alone can men have the assurance that Jesus Christ is the Way, teaches the Truth and gives the Life that is in Jesus Christ Our Lord and God. I found, too that the non-catholic

1. Cfr. Dr. Joseph C. Panjikaran's interview with Mar Ivanios. The entire text is quoted in the Appendix III.

types of christianity were both inefficient to fulfil the very purpose for which our Lord founded the Church. Among the various warring forces, national, racial and economic, I found that there was only one force, supernational super-racial and supra-mundane which could mould human society into a homogenous whole and bring lasting peace and divine blessing to humanity at large. As far as one can at present peer into the future; the Catholic Church is the only force that can stabilize human society and ensure its progress".<sup>1</sup> All those show that Mar Ivanios became fully aware of the fact that the Catholic Church is the true Church established by Christ and is the surest guide of his spiritual life. Therefore he earnestly desired to unite himself with this Church and attain salvation through her. Thus one can say without betraying his conscience, in Mar Ivanios' reunion with the Catholic Church, his spiritual life became the deciding factor.

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1. Cfr. Appendix III.

## CHAPTER III

### **Mar Ivanios' Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary**

Upon getting acquainted with Mar Ivanios' spirituality, one is forcibly struck by his love, unbounded veneration, and a childlike devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. "Devotion to our Blessed Lady", wrote Varghese Karippayil, "Was among the notable traits in the religious character of young Gheevarghese."<sup>1</sup> Father Joshua says, "Mar Ivanios' special virtue is his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and unflinching confidence in our Mother."<sup>2</sup> His devotion to Mary won for him boundless graces. Almost all the important events in his life took place on the feastdays of the Blessed Virgin Mary. For example, he received the Deaconate on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Blessed Virgin Mary; his priestly ordination was on the Feast of the Assumption of Mary; and he died on the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Mother of God, under all her invocations, seemed to be always before him throughout his life.

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1. Varghese Karippayil, *The Reunion Movement in India*, Page 54, Tiruvalla, 1964.
  2. From a letter of Father Joshua who worked with Mar Ivanios, for many years. He also served as Superior General, Novice Master, etc. in the Bethany Community, founded by Mar Ivanios.
  3. Cfr. T. Inchakalody, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios - Chapter 3*, Page 25, Trivandrum, 1957; Varghese Karippayil, *The Reunion Movement in India*, Page 54, Tiruvalla, 1964; Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, P. 126, Dublin, 1962.

The birth of Mar Ivanios was believed to be the effect of a special grace of Mary. In the Panikar family there was no male child and so Mar Ivanios' parents, Sir Thomas Panikar and Anna, without ceasing prayed and offered special sacrifices for the same purpose. Besides, Anna, his mother, a true devotee of Our Lady, sought the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and offered the issue to the Virgin. Thus, Anna gave birth to a male child.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Holy Mary's special help is cited in his vocation to the priesthood. The young Gheevarghese had a strong inclination to the ecclesiastical state and as he grew up, he expressed his desire to his parents. His mother and other Kith and Kins encouraged Gheevarghese, but his father threw cold water on his ardent desire because Thomas Panikar wanted to see his son as a military officer. However, undeterred by the discouragement shown by his father, Gheevarghese spent hours daily in prayers, especially to the Blessed Virgin Mary and in return, his persistence was rewarded by the necessary grace. A kindly fate of Cheevarghese must have persuaded his father to give in and finally allow his son to respond to God's call, to become a priest.<sup>2</sup> Even when he was young, Gheevarghese made a vow of perpetual virginity to God, in honor of Mary: "He solemnly bound himself to a life of virginity"<sup>3</sup> and later he preferred to be ordained a priest, without entering the state of matrimony.<sup>4</sup>

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1. T. Inchakalody, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios* P. 25, Trivandrum, 1959.

2. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios* Chapter 3, Page 10, Dublin, 1962.

3. Varghese Karippayil, *The Reunion Movement in India*, Page 54, Tiruvalla, 1964.

4. Among the Orthodox in South India, celibacy is optional, Thus, even though Mar Ivanios could marry, still he remained chaste in keeping up his vow.

As he grew old, Mar Ivanios', devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary increased in its intensity. In his meditations he never failed to contemplate on Mary' Sorrows, following, in thought, through different stages of the passion of Jesus Christ, and mourning with her at the loss of her beloved Son. <sup>1</sup> In fact, his own last conscious prayer was to Our Lady of Sorrows. <sup>2</sup> During his priestly career, he often impressed upon the faithful, through his teachings and preaching, the powerful patronage of Mary, her beneficence in welcoming sinners, and her motherly assistance, especially in the hour of death. <sup>3</sup> In order that his teachings might come to the notice of a greater number of the faithful, he wrote several pious songs in which he exalted the glories of this heavenly Mother. The following, for example, is an English translation of a prayer that he composed in Syriac <sup>4</sup> language:

“O cloud that rained forth the Dew of Life  
Maid through whose face the sun shines,  
Who stands out among the generations of  
the earth  
And prevents darkness from encompassing it.

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1. Cf. Mar Ivanios' *Meditation Notes*, B. A.

2. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chapter 21, Page 126, Dublin, 1962.

3. Pastoral letter of Mar Ivanios, written on October 5, 1950.

4. 'Syriac' is the official language of the Malankara Liturgy, though now exists its version in the vernacular. Mar Ivanios who was a scholar in Syriac language, had written many poems on blessed virgin Mary.



Central diamond set in the Crown of the  
 Lord of Heaven,  
 Who transmits the light of her Son to the  
 four corners of the Universe,  
 Door unbuilt by hands, uncut by tools,  
 closed forever,  
 Through whom the King of Glory entered once,  
 Ship that carried to us riches from the  
 treasury of the Father,  
 All-pure ever seaworthy vessel piloted  
 by the Prince of Peace  
 Creeper plant that climbed to the zenith  
 of the mountains  
 And budded forth the fruit of life—the Son of God.  
 Mother in whose lap, the sad find comfort, the  
 Sinners, hope, and the saints ecstasy".<sup>1</sup>

Speaking of the Blessed Virgin  
 Mary, in a retreat, Mar Ivanios exhorted the faithful  
 "In union with Mary let us go to the Father through  
 Christ in the Holy Spirit".<sup>1</sup> He had the least doubt  
 that the Imitation of Christ, his life principle, could  
 be carried on through Mary, who was the first and  
 most perfect human being that the world had ever  
 seen. She was Christ's unique and permanent associate  
 and help mate in the entire work of redemption.  
 "Mary, he said, "is the most dynamic person in the  
 world history. She was allowed to take part in the

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1. Cf. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Dublin, 1962, P. 127.

2. Retreat preaching to Bethany Sisters on April 20, 1927, B. A.

first step in the new world of grace; she chose virginity, a way of life which contradicted every tradition, she asked Christ to perform His first miracle; she was the first under the Cross".<sup>1</sup>

For Mar Ivanios, devotion to our Lady and the imitation of her exalted virtues were important factors, not only for the spiritual formation but also for the material betterment of mankind. Mar Ivanios in his Rule, the great heritage left to his monks, says, "Let the brothers have a child-like devotion to the most pure Mother of God, and daily entrust to her the purity of their soul and body".<sup>2</sup> For him, this child-like devotion to Mary was a duty incumbent upon his spiritual sons because his religious community, as any other society, was organized to develop and perfect the spiritual lives of its members. It was also organized to serve [the people of God and to redeem men from sin and suffering through their service.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in order to attain these objectives, Mar Ivanios realized that this child-like devotion to the Mother of God and the effort to imitate her virtues would be a great help to his followers.

As a sign of his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mar Ivanios designated Holy Mary, as the special Patroness of his religious community.<sup>4</sup> In doing so, he rightly proposed the example of Mary's life to his spiritual sons and they

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Meditations for Holy Week*, Tiruvalla, 1926.

2. Rules, Chapter IX, No. 3.

3. Rules, Chapter I. Nos. 1 and 2.

Cf. also the Original Constitution, Page 1.

4. Rules, chapter 1, No. 4.

faithfully followed her in keeping their founder's desire. In addition to the special prayers to Mary everyday, Mar Ivanios, and his followers fasted and observed abstinence every Wednesday in honour of Mary.<sup>1</sup> Many Marian feasts were celebrated in solemnity in the community and many special devotions were practised.<sup>2</sup> Mar Ivanios also established many churches in her name. In fact, more than half of the churches established by Mar Ivanios, are in Mary's name.<sup>3</sup> Among his many pastoral Letters on Blessed Virgin Mary, particular mention is to be made on the one written on October 5, 1950.

There were other occasions, too, where Mar Ivanios expressed his great devotion to the Blessed Virgin. When he was asked to give his opinion about the Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven Mar Ivanios wrote to Pope Pius XII: "My priests and I believe and teach that the Blessed Virgin Mary, after her physical death, was assumed into heaven; soul and body".<sup>4</sup> In the same letter he gave a detailed history of the devotion to the Mother of God. Then he quoted many prayers from the prayer book used by the Syrian Christians of Malankara where Mary's bodily Assumption is clearly mentioned. Finally, he concluded the letter in the following way: "I therefore, with my priests and people, most humbly beg Your Holiness to have the doctrine of the bodily Assumption of the Mother of God into Heaven declared as a dogma of

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Christian Liturgical Year*, Chapter 17.

2. See, *Bethany Custom Book*, Pages 13, 53, 54 and 57.

3. Cf. *The Archdiocesan Calendar* (1968-69).

4. Mar Ivanios' letter to Pope Pius XII, dated November 2, 1946: see Appendix IV.

the Church".<sup>1</sup> All these are nothing more than clear manifestation of his devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In short, to the one who analyzes Mar Ivanios' life from beginning to end, it is clear that Mar Ivanios' devotion to the Mother of God was a devotion which he imbibed with his mother's milk and which increased as he grew old. During his earthly career Mar Ivanios did his best to propagate the same devotion among the people, and his life, itself, was a best example and incentive for it. Most remarkable is his conviction that there is no surer or shorter way to Jesus than the knowledge and love of Mary. Moreover, whosoever would find Jesus must seek at Mary's hands, as it is written of the Magi, that they found Him nowhere else except in His Mother's arms.<sup>2</sup>

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1. This letter is fully quoted in Appendix IV.

2. St. Matthew, Chapter II, 11.

# **PART III**

**Sources of Mar Ivanios'  
Spiritual Life and Doctrine**



## CHAPTER I

### **Scriptural Influence on Mar Ivanios' Life and Doctrine**

In the previous two parts of this book, we have mainly treated Mar Ivanios' life and experience in the Orthodox Church and his spiritual life as reflected in his Rule. We analyse in the third part, the sources of his spiritual life and, consequently of his doctrines. In this chapter our attempt is to study particularly the role of Holy Scripture in his life. This we endeavour to do by analysing his own life, works and his Rules.

#### **A Life Formed in the Spirit of Sacred Scripture.**

Mar Ivanios was born in an Orthodox family<sup>1</sup> of a priestly succession<sup>2</sup>. At home the young Geevarghese was reared in a biblical background as any other Orthodox child would have been. It is said that in an orthodox family the sole reading is the Bible. Even if this is an exaggeration it is the truth that their principal reading is the Sacred Scripture. In the Panikar family Geevarghese, being the eldest son, was the sentinel Bible reader, as the custom followed,

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Bethany Yogam*, p. 10, Tiruvalla, 1930.

2. Cfr. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, p. 4, Dublin, 1962.

when the family gathered to pray.<sup>1</sup> The Orthodox Church has always been recommending and encouraging her faithful in reading the Holy Bible. As a part of her Sunday School teachings, she has been compelling the children to learn a particular portion of the Bible everyday. Thus, when a child finishes his catechetical studies, he will be able to know the whole Bible by heart or at least the important parts. Young Geevarghese was no exception to this traditional practice as is evidenced from his works and homilies.<sup>2</sup>

In the seminary, Geevarghese devoted himself to scriptural studies. There, he utilized every free moment to “prepare sermons, instructions, discourses on the liturgy, and commentaries on scriptural passages.”<sup>3</sup> He often gathered his co-seminarians together and with them he had long discussions on biblical themes.<sup>4</sup> From the Bible he often quoted parables in order to confirm and clarify certain fundamental ideas.<sup>5</sup> When he was a deacon; Gheevarghese, with two priests, conducted a mission largely concerned with Gospel themes and their practical applications.<sup>6</sup> People who

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1. It is a living custom among the Syrian Christians in S. India to recite the daily prayers in common, which is done at least twice a day, morning and evening; Bible reading is its principle part.

2. Cfr. *Love of God, Meditation on Humility, Jeevaprasasm* etc.

3. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chap. 3, P. 12, Dublin, 1962.

4. Father Abraham O. I. C., op. cit., p. 17.

5. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chap. 3, p. 14, Dublin, 1962.

6. Cf. *Archbishop Mar Ivanios* by Thomas Inchakalody, PP: 51-52, Trivandrum 1957.



attended the mission proclaimed its success. "The Malayalam address <sup>1</sup> came down on our heads like tongues of fire, the mien, the gesture, the torrential eloquence in simple and pure Malayalam—the picture stands out in my memory after the lapse of two decades." <sup>2</sup>

Possessing the ability to deliver eloquent and heart touching sermons, Deacon Gheevarghese was frequently invited to preach in various churches of Malabar. An interesting anecdote is cited by Margaret Gibbons in connection with one of his early sermons: "A platform had been erected outdoors for the preacher. People thronged all around it, men climbed earthen fences, and many youths hung from branches of trees so that they would not miss a word of his excellent sermon. . . . As the hour for the preacher's arrival approached, the crowd of people grew tense. Immediately after he arrived, he made the sign of the cross and began: 'Be not as the ox and the mule that have no understanding'! He then explained how rational man should have a goal in life and should strive manfully to reach it. From this point, it was easy to lead his listeners to consider the Christian goal which is salvation. He pointed out impressively the obligation that each person has, that is, to direct his life in thought, word, and deed in order that he might attain heaven and ultimately win salvation." <sup>3</sup>

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1. 'Malayalam' is the mother tongue of Mar Ivanios.

2. Sri Thomas Srinivasam in the *King's Rally*, August, 1953.

3. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chap. 3, P. 15, Dublin, 1962.

The synoptic gospels, in which are contained the simple and unconditional precepts of the Sermon on the Mount and the call of Christ to all that suffer and are heavily burdened, have deeply entered his conscience. "His speech," writes Fr. Abraham, O. I. C., "on the Sermon on the Mount, lasted continuously for more than thirty days. Each day he preached for more than two hours".<sup>1</sup> Other favourite bible themes on which he had given series of sermons are Creation, Incarnation, Church, Sacraments, Christ's suffering and death on the Cross, parable of the Good Samaritan, institution of the Holy Eucharist, etc.<sup>2</sup> From this, we can see that Mar Ivanios, from boyhood to manhood, grew up and increased and flourished by the Sacred Scriptures. He was well aware of the fact, that his mission, which was the spiritual renovation of the Orthodox Church through the individual renovation, could be obtained only by Sacred Scripture, which is the source of all spirituality.

### **Role of Holy Scripture in Christian Life**

Concerning the place of Sacred Scripture in Christian life, Mar Ivanios said, "The Bible, the Word of God, is an open letter from our Heavenly Father and through this letter, the Father advises His children how they can attain Him."<sup>3</sup> "Pious souls", he continued, "by reading this Divine Book, try to follow

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1. Taken from a Letter of Fr. Abraham who was a co-worker of Mar Ivanios; B. A.
  2. Fr. Thomas Inchakalody, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, Chap. 5, P. 52, Trivandrum, 1957.
  3. Exhortation to Bethany monks on May 8, 1929; B. A.

Christ more closely.”<sup>1</sup> On another occasion, in a Retreat, he commented, “If anybody wants to know the real meaning of humility, meekness, and fraternal charity, let him open the Bible and read the life of Christ.”<sup>2</sup> His attitude towards Holy Scripture can be explained from the fact that he often quoted Scriptural texts in his books, sermons, and meditations. For example, in his book ‘Meditations, on Humility’ he gives thirty meditations intended for thirty days, and each meditation begins with a scriptural quotation, either from the Old Testament or the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> These meditations also bear witness to the truth that in his interpretation and explanation of the Scripture, Mar Ivanios seems to be a man inclined to the practical and ethical aspect of the Christian message.<sup>4</sup>

What can be written about Mar Ivanios’ attitude toward incorrect translations of Sacred Scripture? Mar Ivanios, a stickler for correct and accurate version, could never keep silent when an inaccurate or false translation of a scriptural passage had been made. Margaret Gibbons, in her book ‘Mar Ivanios’, cites an anecdote that is noteworthy in this context: “On a Good Friday morning during the church ceremonies, the deacon was reading from St. Paul’s

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1. Exhortation to Bethany monks on May 8, 1929; B. A.

2. Retreat preached on March 25, 1923; B. A.

3. Cf. *Meditation. on Humility* by Mar Ivanios; ‘Meditations’, published in *The Syrian Student Conference Publication*, PP. 1-3.

4. Cf. *Meditations on Humility* by Mar Ivanios; ‘Meditations’, published in *The Syrian Student Conference Publication*, PP. 1-8.

letter, in which the English text was worded like this: "He loved me and delivered Himself for me"; but the significance of the Pauline assertion became weakened and obscured in the Malayalam rendering." This is not the correct text", interposed the 'Abun' (Mar Ivanios), brusquely. "I have read what is here", retorted the deacon, indicating the Testament. The 'Abun' rushed over, snatched the volume out of the reader's hands, and flung it to the other side of the sanctuary. A few minutes of uneasy silence followed, after which the Father, retrieving the book, returned it with an ample apology. He then begged pardon from the congregation and the service proceeded without further incident. "I must revise those poisonous translations" he kept resolving but death found him with that purpose unfulfilled." <sup>1</sup>

### **Spirituality Founded on the Scripture**

Mar Ivanios, who was formed in the biblical tradition and trained according to its spirit, placed supreme reliance on the Bible and was conscientious in referring to it as touchstone for everything. <sup>2</sup> His Rule of Life itself was the 'Imitation of Christ in His Life of Prayer and Action.' <sup>3</sup> This meant nothing else than a following of Christ according to the Bible, Speaking at a public convention, Mar Ivanios

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1. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chapter 8, P. 43, Dublin, 1962.

2. Cf. Mar Ivanios, *True Love of God*, Tiruvalla, 1926.  
 'True Love of God' is a book containing 30 meditations on Humility. Each meditation is based on a relevant scriptural text for its subject matter.

3. Cf. The previous chapter where we treated on Mar Ivanios' spirituality.

said, "God and soul are the two actors in the great drama recorded in the Bible. This book of God and men would not have fulfilled its role, if it merely noted the infinite distance between God and men. But the Bible clearly shows how man can be united with God." <sup>1</sup>

Before beginning his Asrama life, Mar Ivanios visited the Hindu monasteries with the purpose in mind of studying the life of monks there. <sup>2</sup> However, when he started his monastic life, he did not copy the Hindu life as such, but he adapted it to the Christian principles, that is, to the spirit of Sacred Scripture. <sup>3</sup> From the Holy Scripture he derived everything needed for his spiritual life. He received fresh illuminations and discovered hidden meaning contained in the Word of God. <sup>4</sup> At the time of spiritual aridity, he usually opened the Bible and read it for a few minutes. From reading the Bible, he derived great spiritual satisfaction and contentment, Mar Ivanios had a constant habit of consulting the Holy Bible, before he began an important matter or any serious project. In the Bethany history, for instance, we see an explanation that shows how he derived the name 'Bethany' for his religious community. "Everything" says Mar Ivanios, "was decided as to where the first monastery should be.... The next thing under consideration was the name which should be chosen for the new community.... To know the will of God in this matter, we opened

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1. Convention notes on April 25, 1925, B. A.

2. Margaret Gibbons, *op. cit.*; P. 27.

3. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, PP. 61-62, Tiruvalla, 1929.

4. T. Inchakalody, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, Chapter 5, PP. 51-60, Trivandrum, 1957.

the Holy Bible, There, the first word I saw was 'Bethany'. Consequently we accepted the name 'Bethany' for our religious community." <sup>1</sup> Mar Ivanios' last message, which was written to his people from his deathbed, ends with a scriptural note of Christ, Himself: "My beloved children," he wrote. "I bless each one of you. May Christ the King live in your hearts and houses, so that one day you may hear His words: Come ye blessed of my Father and receive the Kingdom prepared for you'." <sup>2</sup>

All these show that Mar Ivanios' spiritual life was based entirely on Sacred Scripture. A study on his meditations and reflections reveals the same, that is, how the Word of God, found in the written books of the Bible, furnished him with his daily spiritual food. <sup>3</sup> Yet, this food was always fresh and warm, in his case. His understanding of the Scriptures was always enlightened by the help of the interpretations of the Fathers of the Church and of the Saints. However, his understanding was not mere repetition of past teaching. His own mind and understanding integrated and assimilated this rich food in a personal and intellectual way, thus rendering it the life-giving blood in his veins. He had an intellectual systematization, a personal interpretation, and application of the great truths of our revelation enriched by the tradition of the church. For example, an entire

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam* P. 69, Tiruvalla, 1929.

2. Mar Ivanios, pastoral letter dated September 21, 1952.

2. Mar Ivanios, 'Meditations', in *Syrian Student Conference Publication*, Kottayam, 1927.

series of his meditations are published by him. <sup>1</sup> In one of these books is this great theme, 'The Love of God', He divided this theme into thirty different meditations, each having a relevant scriptural text for its subject matter. This development of a single meditation consists in reflections on parallel or similar scriptural texts with the interpretations of the fathers and saints. Anecdotes and episodes inscribed, here and there, give greater intelligibility and clarity to the reflections, Practical applications envisage concrete situations of life. In order not to impose his own spiritual reflections on others he omitted after each meditation an entire blank page. He did this to enable the person who might use this book to add his own personal thoughts that he might receive in his spiritual communion with God. <sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter explains that all through out his childhood and youth, Mar Ivanios received an excellent biblical formation and further on he practised it in his daily life. He applied it to his own life and more over through his example led others to follow this line. Thus any one who reads the spiritual life of Mar Ivanios, realizes that the Word of God, present in the holy and divinely inspired Scriptures, remains the source and foundation of his life and doctrine,

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Before God*, Tiruvalla, 1925.
  - .. .. *Meditations on Holy Mass*, Tiruvalla, 1924.
  - .. .. *Meditations for Holy week*, Tiruvalla, 1926.
  - .. .. *Meditations on Humility*, Tiruvalla, 1926.
  2. Mar Ivanios, *Love of God*, Tiruvalla, 1927.

## CHAPTER II

### **Liturgy, source of Mar Ivanios' Spiritual Life**

Having seen the Biblical foundation in Mar Ivanios' life, we now come to analyse another element which has its roots in the Sacred Scripture itself, that is Liturgy. Had the Sacred Liturgy anything to do with Mar Ivanios' life? Or what influence did the liturgy play on Mar Ivanios' spiritual life? Our attempt in this chapter is to find it out by analysing Mar Ivanios' experience in his liturgy and his attitude towards the same.

The word liturgy generally signifies the Holy Mass or Anaphora of the Mass. In this sense we say the liturgy of the Apostles, the liturgy of St. James, etc. In Greek the word liturgy signifies any public cult. Thus in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians, <sup>1</sup> liturgy stands for any oblation or offering given to God. So if the word liturgy is considered literally or as a science it includes all the rites of the Church or all public cult performed in the name of the Church. This is why Pope Pius XII defines it thus: "The Sacred Liturgy, therefore, constitutes the public worship, which our Redeemer, the head of the Church, offers to the heavenly Father; and which the

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1. Phil, 2:17.



community of the faithful christians offers to its founder and through him to the eternal Father; and which, to put everything briefly, constitutes the entire public worship of the mystical body of Jesus Christ, the head and also its members".<sup>1</sup> It is in this sense we use the word liturgy in this chapter as it comprehends and constitutes all the public worship and ecclesiastical offices. However we may restrict it here mainly to the Divine Office and Church celebration.

Mar Ivanios was born, as we have already seen, in the Syrian Orthodox community which enjoys a liturgy that belongs to the Antiochian Rite whose introduction into India dates back to the 17th century.<sup>2</sup> History asserts that this Syrian rite has been one of the oldest rites in the Church and goes back to the ancient rite of Antioch in the time of St. John Chrisostome. It has a liturgy which has preserved an extremely primitive Hebrew character and one feels very close to the source of Christianity. In it the whole salvation history is interpreted in the light of the pratristic tradition. Take, for example, the Divine Office; it is largely made up of original compositions that is based on the tradition established by St. Ephrem in

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1. The original latin text reads; "Sacra igitur liturgia cultum publicum constituit, quem Redemptor noster Ecclesiae caput, caelesti Patri habet; quemque christifidelium societas conditori suo et per ipsum aeterno Patri tribuit; utque omnia breviter perstringamus, integrum constituit publicum cultum mystici Jesu Christi corporis Capitis, nempe membrorumque ejus": AAS. Vol. XXXIX, p. 528-529.

2. The introduction of the Antiochean rite in India is marked with the arrival of Mar Gregorios, Jacobite bishop of Jerusalem in 1665. Cfr. E. Tisserant, *Eastern Christianity in India*. p. 42, Calcutta, 1957.

the fourth century. It is often meditations on the Biblical themes bringing out the mystical and symbolic sense of Scripture. <sup>1</sup> Bede Griffiths writes, "the theme of Adam and Paradise, of the fall and redemption through Christ's descent into 'sheol' to raise up Adam and restore him to Paradise is one of its basic themes; so also is that of the resurrection, the expectation of the dead in 'sheol' and the second coming of Christ. <sup>2</sup> Thus one, by faithfully following it in meditation, goes back to the Bible and both together form one's spiritual life. In the same way the Eucharistic liturgy is centered on Christ, not only on the main events of His redemptive work but on the whole Gospel not without a strong eschatological stress. Biblical themes are brought out there constantly in actual relation to the particular, aspect of the mystery to the person who is participating in the celebration and one can well meditate on the divine truths. The same can be said also of the other liturgical celebrations.

Mar Ivanios was reared and trained in this liturgical tradition. His vocation to the priesthood gave him the occasion to make special studies on his liturgy. The Jacobite Church in South India, in fact, gives great importance to the liturgical formation of clerics. Perhaps they may not be masters of the scholastic philosophy or theology, but they are taught well in their liturgy. During Mar Ivanios' seminary

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1. Cfr. *The Divine Office of the Syro-Malankarites*, trans. by Frs. Abraham and Cyril O. I. C., Trivandrum, 1970, pp. 29, 45, 129, 146, 173, 157, 241, 301 and 363.

2. B. Griffiths, *Christian Asram*, p. 43, London, 1966.

studies he became very much interested in his liturgy and hence was called the 'liturgist'.<sup>1</sup> His desire for a liturgical renovation among the Jacobites took him, even when he was a deacon, to different churches, where he taught the faithful the great importance of the liturgy.<sup>2</sup> Its result was unpredictable: great attendance at the sacred liturgies, chant and hymnody improved and the little children became more enthusiastic to be present at the catechetical instructions.<sup>3</sup> The faithful as a whole threw themselves earnestly into the study of the Sacred liturgy.<sup>4</sup>

Mar Ivanios' ordination to the priesthood added new impetus to his liturgical spirit. He organized a small group to go to different parishes, especially on Sundays, and to preach to the faithful the importance of their liturgy.<sup>5</sup> In this he viewed a spiritual renovation among the faithful.<sup>6</sup> People from miles away gathered to there to attend the liturgical services beautifully performed by Mar Ivanios. Even in the wilderness of Pcrunad where his monastery was located people crowded to take part in his liturgical functions exquisitely performed. Mar Ivanios himself

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1. Cfr. T. Inchakalody, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, p.51, Trivandrum, 1957.

2. Abraham O. I. C., *Bethany Asram*, p. 13 (Manuscript).

3. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, p. 42, Dublin, 1963.

4. Abraham O. I. C., *Bethany Asram*, p. 14, Trivandrum (Manuscript).

5. Inchakalody, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

6. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, p. 51, Tiruvalla, 1929.

states that “temporary sheds had to be erected, especially during the Lenten season to accomodate the tens of thousands gathered there to attend the liturgical function.”<sup>1</sup>

### Image of Mar Ivanios' Experience in Liturgy.

The Eucharistic liturgy, Holy Qurbana, was a great source of his spiritual life. Speaking of the participation in the Holy Mass Mar Ivanios says, “We can offer to God no greater honour than worthly participating in the Holy Sacrifice”<sup>2</sup> In his book “Love of God”, where it is said of the Holy Mass as the greatest sign of God’s love towards mankind, Mar Ivanios says, “Christ is our ‘daily food; then why should we not eat this food every day? Without eating this food how can we follow Christ in this world of tribualations’”?<sup>3</sup> During Holy Mass, little before the distribution of the Holy Communion, Mar Ivanios once reminded the faithful of their obligation to receive the Eucharistic Christ. “A traveller”, said he, “has taken with him, some food to eat on his way; but if he does not eat it, then whose fault is it? In the same way we have here the heavenly food; we should eat it and thus travel with Christ”.<sup>4</sup> He had great devotion to the Eucharistic Christ. In his book ‘Before God’, he clearly explained the Eucharist as the fountain head

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, p. 51, Tiruvalla. 1929.

2. Mar Ivanios, *Rubrics of the Malankara Mass*, p. 1, Tiruvalla, 1951.

3. Mar Ivanios, *Love of God*, p. 103, Tiruvalla, 1927.

4. During the Mass on July 24, 1930; B. A.

of spiritual life; by worshiping this Eucharistic Lord one could attain merits which enabled one to acquire eternal salvation".<sup>1</sup> Are not all these external expressions of real internal experience ?

Realising the great importance of the Eucharistic liturgy Mar Ivanios, in his Rule wrote, "on all days....after the morning office, a liturgy shall be celebrated at which the brothers who are not priests shall assist".<sup>2</sup> Again, "Liturgy with more solemnity....shall be celebrated on Sundays and on all important feast days....".<sup>3</sup> Besides, "the priest brothers shall not omit the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy....".<sup>4</sup>

The influence of Divine Office on Mar Ivanios' life was also not without effect as, evidenced from his writings and exhortations. In his book, 'The Christian Liturgical Year, Mar Ivanios wrote, "Christ said, where two or three are gathered in my name there I will be; so when we come together to pray we must see Christ with our spiritual eyes".<sup>5</sup> His exhortation once given to the Novices is noteworthy for this instance: "In our liturgy (meaning divine office) we meditate on the fundamental truths of salvation

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Before God*, Tiruvalla, 1926.

2. Rule, Chapter XIII, A, Ib.

Here one should particularly note that he codified his rule in the Jacobite Church where the priests do not celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy every day.

3. Rule, Ch. 13, A. Ib.

4. Ibidem.

5. Mar Ivanios, *The Christian Liturgical Year*, p. 26, Tiruvalla, 1926.

history; we see Christ as the one Whom we worship and address when we rise up and lay down, eat and drink, at work or rest, alone or in company".<sup>1</sup> Explaining the Good Friday ceremonies, Mar Ivanios commented, "the disciples of Christ get a living image of Christ in the liturgy. This image gradually penetrates into the depth of their beings and make them more and more like their master".<sup>2</sup> Can any one say that these teachings of Mar Ivanios had no relation to his own life? It would be reasonable to think that these really express his own personal life.

As he had great esteem for the Divine Office, Mar Ivanios also advise his followers to keep up that liturgical spirit. In his Rule he wrote, "all brothers must set a high value on the Divine office, recite it with attention, piety and recollection, and pronounce the words distinctly with one heart and one voice....The Divine Office shall be recited in choir daily at the appointed time....".<sup>3</sup> Thus in this way, he trained not only himself but also his followers in a proper liturgical spirit which from its part, helped them to follow Christ better. His above teaching on the Divine Office could be better esteemed from the fact that in the Malankara Rite the obligation of the recitation of Breviary among the clergy is not under the pain of sin.

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1. Mar Ivanios' Exhortation to the Bethany Novices, on April 6, 1933; B. A.

2. Mar Ivanios, On Good Friday, in 1927; B. A.

3. Rule, chapter XIII, B, Nos, 1, 2.

Mar Ivanios' liturgical spirit with regard to other liturgical celebrations remains the same though we mentioned here only about the Divine office and the Eucharist liturgy. While explaining his life principle which consists in the imitation of Christ in his life of prayer and action, Mar Ivanios further clarified, "the factors of the life of prayer are the Sacred liturgy, the divine office, Spiritual reading, meditation, examen of conscience reception of the Sacrament of penance and Divine Eucharist, silence, holy recollection, common life and other pious exercises".<sup>1</sup> Thus we see he intended and included all liturgical celebrations to be held perfectly in the life of every religious in his community.

This chapter would not be complete without reference to Mar Ivanios' great devotion and love towards his rite and liturgy. We may mention here one example: ever since the unhappy division among the St. Thomas Christians, constant and sincere attempts were made to be reconciled with the Catholic Church. But all such attempts were foiled due to various reasons. Finally, in the first half of this century, the Jacobite prelates decided to continue the reunion attempts with Rome. At a meeting of the bishops synod<sup>2</sup> it was decided that Mar Ivanios should negotiate with Rome in view of reunion. Thus, he wrote to the Sacred Congregation<sup>3</sup> a memorandum with the title "what is wanted". In this memorandum he clearly specified his

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1. Rule, Chapter 1, No 2.

2. Synod held on November 1, 1926.

3. S. Congregation in November 1926; AAT.

wants, i. e. the entry of the Jacobite Church into the unity of the Catholic Church. However, he specified this reunion should be under the condition, namely, a reunion in the basis of recognition of the Jacobite rites and rituals.<sup>1</sup> He desired earnestly to be reconciled with the true church of Christ; however, he loved his liturgy so much, that he did not want to abandon it, but to continue it in the Catholic Church.

To conclude, we have seen in general the special characteristics of the Antiochene liturgy which Mar Ivanios inherited by his birth and in which he had an excellent training. Further on, we saw that Mar Ivanios tried to live according to the spirit of his liturgy, and through his example, taught others too to keep it up in their daily practice. Thus one could rightly conclude that his liturgy had played a significant part in the formation of his spiritual life.

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1. Cfr. AAT, A, 2/1927.



## CHAPTER III

### **Indian Traditions in Mar Ivanios' life.**

After explaining the scriptural and liturgical influences in Mar Ivanios' life, we now come to examine whether there was any other influence, besides scriptural and liturgical in Mar Ivanios' spiritual life. In the following pages we will see that the Indian traditions, have also played a significant role in the formation of Mar Ivanios' spiritual life.

For an inquirer of Mar Ivanios' spirituality, the best distinguishing mark is its indigenous character. In his Rule of life, which has also become the rule of his religious community, Mar Ivanios states: "The special end of the congregation shall be to imitate...Our Lord Jesus Christ...through the adaptation of the Indian ways of life".<sup>1</sup> As his life was, so also Mar Ivanios intended that his community must bear the stamp of the Indian culture. He saw that in a country like India with a long traditional culture which is intimately bound up with religion, there could be no place among the people for a society with a culture foreign to the Indian mind. Every nation has

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1. Rules, Chapter 1, No. 2.

its own culture, its own personality, and the older the nation, the greater the personality with its vast wealth of experiences and acquisitions. The traditional practices and customs form the integral part of its personality, and every member of the nation cherishes and wants to preserve it. Therefore when Mar Ivanios was determined to found an Asram, he adapted many customs and practices of the Hindu monks. Thus he became the founder of a Christian monastic life, that was in true harmony with Christian principles and, at the same time, bearing the true stamp of the Indian culture.

### **Meaning of adaptation**

one may be prompted here to ask what did Mar Ivanios mean by adaptation and what did he adapt? As we understand from his way of life and teachings, to Mar Ivanios, adaptation means: (a) accommodation of the non-essential externals of Christianity to the genius, culture mind, and the laudable customs of The Indian nation or the Indian people: (b) acceptance and assumption of all that is true, good, and beautiful in the Indian culture. He has expressed this in clear terms on many occasions. "India in its religious life", he wrote, "has an ancient tradition. The church should not destroy that tradition; on the contrary it must accept from it whatever is good, that is what is not against faith and morals, and Christianize it. Thus, we must prove that the Christian religion is not foreign to India as many say, and that it is above such national feelings. . . . The great faith that was given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ through His beloved apostle, St. Thomas, is to be spread all throughout our country,

that is in a way suitable to India. This is the ideal of Bethany'.<sup>1</sup> In the 17th century Robert de Nobili,<sup>2</sup> identifying himself in every possible way with Indian life and culture, and adapting certain Hindu customs, tried to Indianize the Christian religion in India. But his experiment was short lived owing to opposition which it raised. After De Nobili nobody dared to try it again until Mar Ivanios' time. Father E. R. Hambye S. J., wrote later, "P. T. Gheevarghese, later Mar Ivanios, realized that Christian ideals should be integrated in the Indian milieu fully and without second thoughts. For the first time, perhaps, since De Nobili and his Jesuit followers of the Madurai Mission, somebody in India could find it possible to identify Christian religious life with that of Indian ascetics and mendicants. It was not simply as a question of external habits, so important may these appear. But was above all, a desire of making religious life relevant to the millions of his compatriots who aspired at seeing Christ present actively in his followers in a way which be naturally and immediately understood by them."<sup>3</sup>

This kind of adaptation, in fact, is of the greatest importance in the eyes of the church. The church has always respected the native customs and rites of the people whom she embraced. By the very nature of her universality, the church cannot go

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1. Pastoral letter dated Nov. 12, 1946.

2. Robert de Nobili, an Italian missionary, was in India from 1605 to 1656.

3. Fr. E. R. Hambye, S. J., in *Reflection on the Religious Ideal of Mar Ivanios*: B. A.

against the national customs and culture of the people. She is to lead the people to Christ. She is not the religion of one nation or one particular country; she is universal. What is human is neither Indian nor European, says Dr. Radhakrishnan.<sup>1</sup> She is the Mystical Body of Christ at whom the faithful from all over the world are aiming.

### **Origin of adaptation**

Adaptations really start from the Supreme example of the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity who adapted Himself to humanity in order to redeem the whole humanity. "The Word was made flesh".<sup>2</sup> Christ strictly observed the prescriptions of the Jewish religion. He submitted Himself to be circumcised; He attended the services in the temple; He was present at the pasch every year in the temple of Jerusalem. God had adopted Himself to humanity with all its limitations, deficiencies, and miseries. God had adapted Himself to men to save men:

The Apostles also followed the example of the Master. In the council of Jerusalem, it was decided that the Jewish customs should not be imposed upon the Gentiles on their conversion.<sup>3</sup> In Athens, St. Paul appealed to the religiosity of the people instead of condemning their idolatry and tried to win them for Christ.<sup>4</sup> St. Paul says, "With the Jews, I lived

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1. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*; vol. 1, London (1962), P. 8.

2. St. John, Chapter 1.14.

3. Acts, Chapter 15.

4. Acts, Chapter 17, 22-34.

like a Jew to win them for Christ.”<sup>1</sup> The Church has to do likewise in adapting herself to the different cultures of the nations and to the successive civilizations of the generations in order to save them. The history of the Church is the history of adaptation. After purifying their errors, Christianity has adapted the wisdom of pagan philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, etc. After correcting and reforming them, Christianity has adapted the Jewish and pagan rituals in the service of true religion; Christianity has converted pagan temples into Christian churches for divine worship. Church history shows that the church authorities have strongly recommended the adaptation of national customs and cultures. Pope Gregory the Great wrote to Abbot Mellitus, the companion of St. Augustine of Canterbury: “Tell Augustine that he should not destroy the temple of the Gods but rather the idols within those temples....;”<sup>2</sup> Pope Pius XII says: “Whatever there is in the local customs that is not insperably bound up with superstition and error, will always receive kind consideration and when possible will be perserved intact.”<sup>3</sup> The Second Vatican Council made it so clear that “the purpose of the Church has been to adapt the Gospel to the comprehension of all as well as to the needs of the learned.”<sup>4</sup> Again, “the manner of living, praying, and working should be suitably adapted to the needs of the apostolate, the requirements of a given

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1. 1 Cor. 9.20.

2. Cf. P. L. 77, 1215-16.

3. A. A. S. 31 (1939) 429.

4. *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 3

culture”<sup>1</sup> Here, the Council stresses that the adaptation of the religious life to the local culture is vital, especially in the mission countries.

### **Mar Ivanios' view on adaptation**

Mar Ivanios, the founder of the Christian Asram, visualized that he could create a Christian monasticism in India only through the adaptation of its culture. In order to save the Indians, his society had to incarnate in the Indian cultural values and to bear on herself the Indian cultural garb; the Indians must find they are at home. Therefore, he adapted for himself and for his followers a purely Indian monastic life, a life equal to the life of the Hindu monks. He found this necessary for the evangelization of non-Christians, which was also one of the aims of Bethany Congregation.<sup>2</sup> He says, “The Syro-Malankara Community, which takes pride in having St. Thomas the Apostle as its founder, has not yet done anything substantial to achieve the object of its foundation. That great light which was kindled here in 52 A. D. by the command of Jesus Christ, Our Redeemer, still remains in the same way. Its light and glory have not spread to the dark surroundings”.<sup>3</sup> One might ask why the light and glory have not yet spread. They have not spread because the Church has not yet been Indianized; Christianity was considered, by many, as foreign to India. But Mar Ivanios knew well

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1. *Decree on Religious Life*, No. 3.

2. Cf. *Rules*, Chapter 1, Nos. 2 and 3.

3. Mar Ivanios, *Giridēepam* p. 50, Tiruvalla, 1929.

that Christianity was neither Eastern nor Western. It is fully legitimate for Christianity to incorporate the Indian culture in India. <sup>1</sup>

To preach the Gospel of Christ and to make it grow in the ancient and rich soil of Indian culture, yet to preserve its great religious heritage and ascetical traditions, Mar Ivanios saw that adaptation of the ways of life was absolutely necessary. That was the reason why, before entering into religious life, he wrote to Mar Dyonisius, his bishop, to give him a special dress which would be suitable to the Indian culture. "We request," he wrote "your, Grace to assign to Deacon Mattackal <sup>2</sup> and me a religious habit that is suited to our special mission of the preaching of the gospel to the gentiles....." This habit should be the least expensive; and it should be such that by wearing this habit, we should be able to preach the gospel in every part of India, in pursuance of the Lord's command that thou should not have two tunics. It should be such that Hindus as well as Buddhists and Moslems should easily accept this dress, without prejudice, as a dress suited to men who are engaged in the work of God; It should be different from the habits presently worn by the various religious groups in India. This habit should be such that it should make non-Christians feel at home with us, so that they may be easily prompted to come and listen to us. <sup>3</sup>

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1. Fr. Andrew, O. I. C. 'Bethany-The Embodiment of a Revolutionary Idea', Cf. *Kathirukal* (1967), No. 7. p. 15.

2. Deacon Mattackal is a companion and a co-worker with Mar Ivanios, in the establishment of Bethany Asram.

3. Cf. Mar Ivanios' letter from Serampore, on Nov. 25, 1917.

For Mar Ivanios, it was not a question of adapting mere externals of Hinduism or adapting certain ceremonies of Christianity to cater to the Hindus; it was a question of an essentially indigenous growth, a new off-shoot of Christianity in all its native vigour and riches. <sup>1</sup> Accordingly, Mar Ivanios and his followers adapted a mode of life which was a life true to the Christian principles and blended with the venerable customs of the Indian sanyasis. In the religious history of India, if a particular form of life for spiritual attainment peculiar to Indian civilization has taken place, that is the life of the sanyasa. To an Indian mind, a sanyasin means a man who renounces everything, leads a humble, simple and prayerful life, and who is in the world but not of the world: a man led by the spirit. “He renounces ‘all his possessions, except his loin-cloth, begging bowl and water pot and subsisting on food obtained by begging’”. <sup>2</sup> “He lives as a wandering mendicant without shelter without fire in a state of complete indifference.” <sup>3</sup> In his way of life, dress, food, behaviour, and religious practices he is a model to everyone. “He abstains from wine, meat, perfumes, garlands, sweetmeats, and women, he should not take acid food nor do harm to any living being. He shouldn't have any ointments, collyrium, shoes or umbrella. He must avoid lust, anger, and greed.....Gambling, gossip, slander, and untruth are to be shunned: He should neither look at nor touch women. He should never strike anybody.

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1. Cf. Bethany—The Embodiment of Revolutionary Idea', by Fr. Andrew, in *Kathirukal*, 1967. No. 7, p. 15.

2. Benjamin Walker, *Hindu World*, Vol. I, p. 85.

3. R. Antoine, Hindu Ethics in *Religious Hinduism*, p. 117.



Let him sleep alone in continence".<sup>1</sup> He renounces everything and lives in a complete indifference. "He wishes neither for death, nor for life. The sanyasi should wait for the appointed time as a labourer for his wages. His feet should be guided by his eyes; the water he drinks, strained through a cloth; his speech, purified by truth; and his conduct governed by reason. May he endure insult without retaliation; may he not have any money, knowing that his body is of no value. Let him never answer anger with anger but rather bless those who curse him. Truthful in speech he should find his delight in the supreme and be indifferent to all pleasure. Having no friends except himself, let him wander here upon earth in quest of true happiness".<sup>2</sup> These are the principles contained in the rule of life of a sayasi. A real sanyasi always finds pleasure in these life principles.

Mar Ivanios and his followers, imitating the Hindu monks, led a simple and humble life. Inspired by the lives of the Indian 'Rsis' who lived in the forest,<sup>3</sup> they began a monastic life in the wilderness, a place quite unknown at that time. This place was situated in an obscure forest where there were no attractions. The only people who frequented this area, were men who desired to flee from the pomp and bustle of the world, men who wished to live alone with God in obscurity. "The story of Perunad", writes Margaret Gibbons, "is as romantic as that of any foundation of

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1. *Manusmriti*, II, 177-180.

2. *Manusmriti*, VI, 45-49.

3. *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. I, p. 8.

the Middle Ages. From Dwarf mountain looking West the eye follows a sweeping descent that is bounded by the curve of a broad river in the distance. Looking East, the piled up Ghats rush towering to the sky. In between, at the turn of the century, great jungle gorges went dipping down to the valley floor in depths too dark to fathom. In the wilderness, at that time, could be heard the mating call of the fierce Indian tiger, the trumpeting of tusker elephants, the snoring of wild boars and snarl of angry leopards. Wolves and bears were often seen and herds of wild pigs wandered about night and day in close proximity to the Bethany compound.”<sup>1</sup> In this wilderness the first Bethany Asram was built, according to the pattern of a Hindu sanyas’s dwelling place. Mar Ivanios, himself, gives us a picture of his first Asram: “The first Asram was built out of bamboos and woods which were collected from the same surroundings. Its roofing was of a kind of grass that grew in that forest. Bamboo Curtains served the purpose of walls and window curtains. The floor which was earthen was painted with a solution of cow dung”<sup>2</sup> The cell, which was only separated by bamboo curtains, was narrow and small. At any moment the wild beasts were able to get into the dwelling.<sup>3</sup> In the cell there wasn’t any furniture, except a cot which was made out of jungle sticks and a cross. In the entire dwelling, there was no display of worldliness at all.<sup>4</sup> Tables and chairs were luxuries to them. They went barefooted and lived on alms and manual

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1. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chap. 6. P. 27, Dublin, 1962.

2. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, PP. 80-81, Tiruvalla, 1929.

3. Ibidem.

4. Rules, Chapter XIV, No. 2.

labour. It was Mar Ivanios who often went around begging from door to door, reaching out a begging bowl like any Hindu mendicant.'<sup>1</sup> Thus, in that forest they led a life which was even below the life of the poor Indian villagers.

Keeping the great religious heritage of India, Mar Ivanios adapted for himself and his followers, the 'Kavi' (suffron-coloured) habit of the Indian sanyasis.<sup>2</sup> In India the Kavi habit is common to both the Buddhist and the Hindu ascetics. This tradition of wearing the Kavi habit goes back to the earliest period of Indian history.<sup>3</sup> 'Kavi' habit is usually made from cloths which have been dipped in red mud. This signifies the external poverty that the sanyasi has freely taken. This external poverty is also considered to be an essential mark of holiness in India. Without doubt, it makes a deep impression on a Hindu. It also reminds the monks of God's warning that "you are dust and unto dust you shall return."<sup>4</sup> In this way, Mar Ivanios entered into the tradition of the Indian sanyasa and established a Christian monastery in which the life of prayer and asceticism could be followed along Christian lines, yet always keeping in touch with the Indian tradition. This helped them to be always in touch with the Hindu sanyasi. Many of these Hindu sanyasis even sought advice from the Christian sanyasis.<sup>5</sup> Before beginning his monastic system, Mar Ivanios visited many

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1. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, Chap. 4, P. 91, Tiruvalla, 1929.

2. Rules. Chapter 4,1.

3. Cf. *Cultural Heritage of India* Vol. I, P. 19.

4. Genesis, Chapter, 3, 19.

5. M. Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, P. 36, Dublin, 1962.

Hindu Asrams, such as Tagore's International Institute and Gandhi's Asram, for the purpose of studying the life of the monks there and their system. From there, he brought a new vision of a Christian monasticism in India.

True to the monastic traditions of the Indian sanyasis, Mar Ivanios and his followers practised vegetarianism.<sup>1</sup> Eating meat was considered a luxury foreign to Indian taste and was forbidden. They sat on the floor and ate food with their hands in plain earthenware<sup>2</sup> or in coconut shells.<sup>3</sup> Their main food was rice and curry made out of vegetables. 'Kanji' (rice boiled in water) was served for breakfast and supper; rice and curry were served for lunch.<sup>4</sup> Each one washed his plates.<sup>5</sup> Cooking was done by the monks themselves.<sup>6</sup> They did not consume eggs or fish,<sup>7</sup> nor did they take any alcoholic drinks. They also abstained from any other stimulants, such as smoking and chewing betel, which is a leaf-like ivy.<sup>8</sup> They even forwent tea and coffee.<sup>9</sup>

This was not all. Mar Ivanios and his companions intended to identify themselves with

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1. Rules, Chapter 17, No. 4.

2. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam* P. 101, Tiruvalla. 1929.

3. Fr. Abraham, *Bethany Asram*, p. 7 (manuscript); B. A.

4. Mar Ivanios, *Girideepam*, P. 102, Tiruvalla, 1929.

Fr. Abraham, *Bethany Asram*, P. 7 (manuscript), B.A.

5. Mar Ivanios. *Girideepam*, P. 101, Tiruvalla, 1929.

6. Ibidem, P. 102.

7. Fr. Abraham, *Bethany Asram*, p. 19; B. A.

8. Rules, Chapter XVII, No. 4.

9. M. Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chapter 7; P. 32, Dublin 1962.

the Hindu monks in all possible manner. So they accepted many existing Hindu practices which they integrated with the Christian life. Among many such practices, adopted by Mar Ivanios and his companions, include:

**a) The Way of Prayer, Paying Homage  
and Reverence to God**

Before a Hindu enters a holy place or temple, he first removes his shoes and then washes his hands and feet, if it is possible—in fact, one can always see a pond near a temple. Thus he purifies himself, in order to be physically worthy to stand in front of a god whom he tries to commune with in the temple. When he enters the temple, he makes a salutation with the joining of the hands at the level of the chest, or the forehead or, sometimes even above the head, as he intends to express a mere salutation or reverence or an intense supplication. For the Hindu temple is considered as the sanctuary of a god or goddess.<sup>1</sup> “The Hindu temple”, Bede Griffiths says, “is itself essentially a ‘sacrament’, a representation of the divine mystery manifested in nature and the human soul. On the outer walls will be depicted the world of nature, of plants and animals and men gradually rising to the world of the gods. As we approach the inner Shrine, we are led through various degrees of purification, until we reach the holy place, which is the ‘center’ at once of the universe and of the soul. It is the ‘womb’ from which all things spring and at the same time the ‘cave within

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1. *Religious Hinduism*, op. cit., P. 153.

the heart', the secret place where man enters into communion with the ultimate mystery''<sup>1</sup> for prayer and meditation. He usually squats on the floor cross-legged.<sup>2</sup> This is one of the Yoga techniques which is of great help, if properly done, for recollection and concentration. It secures complete stillness of the body so that the attention can be entirely centered on God. During the prayer and especially when he ends the prayer, he touches the ground with forehead, hands and knees, as a special sign of submission and reverence.

Mar Ivanios adapted many of these Hindu ways of prayer and paying homage and reverence to God and made it Christian. He found it necessary in order to be an Indian Christian monk among the Hindu monks. Thus he followed in his monastery such pious traditional customs of the Indian, such as taking off the shoes when entering a church or chapel; salutation by profound bow with the joining of the hands, instead of genuflections; showing veneration and submission by touching the ground with forehead, especially while one leaves the church; meditation squatting on the floor cross-legged, etc.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Bede Griffiths, *Christian Asram*, Chapter 7. P. 99, London, 1966.

2. Squatting on the floor cross-legged is considered as a reverential posture among almost all religions in India. So whether in temple for congregational worship or praying at home, a Hindu is always found in this posture.

3. For these and such other pious adapted customs, cf. *Bethany custom book*.

**b) Growing Beard:**

Imitating the Hindu monks and the Eastern tradition Mar Ivanios adapted the practice of growing beard by himself and by the other members of his Asram. Hindus always consider a bearded monk as a person of great austerity and one who practices severe penance. For them the beard is also an external sign of separation from the world and its pleasures, because there is a common feeling among the Eastern people that a smooth face carries with it the suggestion of voluptuous life. These and such others may be reasons why most Oriental people and Jews cherished the habit of growing beard. For them to cut the beard of another man was an outrage; <sup>1</sup> to shave or to pluck one's own beard was a sign of mourning; <sup>2</sup> to allow the beard to be defiled constituted a presumption of madness; <sup>3</sup> even certain ceremonial cuttings of the beard were strictly forbidden. <sup>4</sup> These and such other biblical testimonies are confirmed by the testimony of the Egyptian and Assyrian monuments in which the Jews are invariably depicted as bearded. <sup>5</sup>

In the Christian heritage we see that Christ and the Apostles in most ancient monuments are, for the most part, represented as bearded. <sup>6</sup> When the Church, born in the Middle East, launched into

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1. 2 Kings, 10.4

2. Jer., 41.5; 48.36.

3. 1 Kings, 21.13

4. Levi, 19.27, 21.5

5. Thalhoffer, in *Kirchenlsc.*, I, 2049-51.

6. Cf. Weiss-Liebersdorff, *Christus and Apostelbilder*, Freiburg, 1902.

the Graeco-Roman world, it adapted itself to the new culture and civilization. Thus gradually in Rome and the western world, clergy began to cut off their beard, while the East followed the usual practice of keeping it.

The first positive prohibition against growing beard in the western church came from the so-called Fourth Council of Carthage. In Canon 44 of the same Council it is said that cleric is to allow neither hair nor beard to grow freely. This legislation, though probably directed only against beards of excessive length, remained in force in the western church. But throughout the centuries there were even Popes and Cardinals who earnestly desired to bring about a return to the earlier usage. For example, we see the portrait of Pope Clement VII (1523) with a distinct beard and many of his successors, as Pope Paul III, allowed the beard to grow to considerable length.<sup>1</sup> Again, it was St. Charles Borromeo who attempted to check the spread of the new fashion. He addressed to his clergy in 1576 a pastoral "De Barba Radenda", exhorting them to observe the Canon.<sup>2</sup> The present regulation in the Western Church, except religious orders, requires the permission of the local Ordinary if any clergy desires to grow beard.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Cf. Seghers, 'The Practice of Shaving in the Church' in *Am. Cath. Quart. Rev.*, (1882), 278.

2. *Ibidem*.

3. The Sacred Congregation of the Council on January 10, 1920 declared that the Code of Canon Law does not give liberty to all the secular clergy to wear a beard, and that bishops may forbid it in their respective dioceses: *Acta Ap. Sedis*, XII, 43.



Mar Ivanios' attitude with regard to the practice of growing beard was very positive and encouraging. In keeping with the Eastern tradition,<sup>1</sup> and the laudable custom of the Hindu monks, Mar Ivanios exhorted his monks, without exception, to grow beard. After his reunion with the Catholic Church, he, then Metropolitan of the Malankara Rite, enforced this pious practice even among the diocesan clergy. As for himself, he had a very long beard. "His keen and vigilant face", said Mr. G. K. Chesterton, "looked browner behind his grey luxuriant beard".<sup>2</sup> This certainly helped Mar Ivanios to contact freely many Hindus, priests and laymen, and make friends with them. The Hindu Maharajah (king) wrote at Mar Ivanios' death, "His death is a loss, an individual loss to the members of our family and myself. During the many past years, I have come to know him intimately. He has been a close friend of ours".<sup>3</sup>

### c) **Covering the Shoulders with a Saffron-Coloured Shawl:**

The Hindu and Buddhist Sanyasi always wear such a shawl. The reason is, first of all, for modesty. They consider themselves to be immodestly dressed if they go without their shawl. It may be compared with the Indian woman's mode of keeping their heads covered as a sign of modesty.

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1. Cf. Code of Oriental Canon Law: "The Motu Proprio Cleri Sanctitati," Canon 77.

2. See Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, P. 75, Dublin, 1962.

3. *Ibidem*, P. 129.

The women are considered to be modestly dressed if they keep their heads covered, especially when they talk to a respectable person, or visit temples or churches. Thus, it becomes a sign of respect and humility. So too, it is with the Indian monks. They, by wearing it, are reminded of their nothingness in the eyes of God, and at the same time, of their obligation to give respect to their neighbour. Another practical reason for which a monk wears a shawl is that of protection from the heavy rain and the terrible heat. For the monks, it is the only means by which they try to keep themselves dry and also free themselves from being too hot. Moreover, an Indian monk is a nomad and a man who possesses nothing except a begging bowl and a bare minimum of clothes to cover his body. He travels from place to place on foot. At night when he stops to rest, he stays at an inn. This inn should not be compared to an inn or hotel in the western countries. The inn where the Hindu monk stays overnight is just a slight place of protection from the night air and weather. It is just made of a roof over a patio-type floor. When the monk stops to rest for the night, he uses this shawl as a mat. It may be a very crude type of bedding in the western eyes, but for the Indian monk, it is quite comfortable, if not a luxury, because he is detached from the world and its pleasures. He considers it to be a type of penance which he would use to atone for his sins. It is also considered as a sign of external poverty. In conclusion, it would seem that the use of a shawl is not an unnecessary symbol, but rather that it is quite necessary for an Indian monk to wear one.

Mar Ivanios, who had a good experience among the Hindu monks and of their customs, adapted this practice of wearing a shawl for himself and his followers. In this way, he tried to identify himself with the Indian monks as far as possible, and it was no wonder if he was often called 'swami'.<sup>1</sup> This pious custom of wearing shawls, gradually disappeared among his followers, especially after their reunion with the Catholic Church. This may be due to the impact of the western culture in the religious society.

#### **d) Wearing a Wooden Cross:**

Wearing a wooden cross attached to a saffron-coloured cotton thread is in imitation of the Hindu Sanyasis who always wear beads strung on a thread. The use of beads, strung on a thread or cord and often tied around the neck, is of ancient practice among the Hindus and Buddhists. One sect among the Hindus, use a chaplet consisting, generally, of one-hundred and eight beads, made of the wood of the Sacred Tulsi shrub to tell the names of Vishnu. Another sect accomplish its invocations of 'Siva' by means of a string of thirty-two or sixty-four berries of the Rudraksha tree. Some of the ascetics even use the beads made of the teeth of dead bodies. All monks, both Hindu and Buddhist, without any exception wear one or the other kind of strings of beads for use at prayer. This might have influenced Mar Ivanios to adapt something similar to this Hindu tradition for him and his followers.

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1. A title given to a Hindu religious teacher.

He finally decided to wear a wooden cross which is tied to a saffron-coloured cotton-thread, instead of the string of beads used by the Hindu monks. In doing so Mar Ivanios not only reminded himself of the fact that he, as a follower of Christ, must be nailed to this cross, but also reminded others that the cross is the instrument of man's salvation from slavery to this world and to sin and the means of his renewal. <sup>1</sup>

### e) Study of Hinduism:

The failure of the Indian Church in its evangelization consists mainly in the fact that very little attempt was made to understand the religion of the people to whom the gospel was to be preached. History is the witness to the facts that Indian religion has a wonderful tradition which has been developing for centuries. Indian people have their own cultural heritage. Without knowing their tradition and cultural heritage, one cannot perform a fruitful apostolate. This was the reason why Mar Ivanios especially recommended the study of Hinduism to his followers who vowed to imitate Christ in his life of prayer and action. <sup>2</sup> He himself showed great interest in studying the Hindu sacred writings, particularly 'Ramayana' and 'Bhagavad Gita'. For practical knowledge, besides visiting many Hindu Asrams such as 'Ramakrishna Mission', 'Tagore's International Institute' and 'Gandhi's Asram', <sup>3</sup> he held many conferences with Hindu Sanyasis and teachers. This he continued throughout his life.

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1. Gal. Chapter, 3, 1

2. Rules, Chapter 11, No. 5.

3. Margaret Gibbons, *Mar Ivanios*, Chapter 6, p. 27, Dublin, 1962.

To conclude, we have seen that Mar Ivanios in his imitation of Christ's life of prayers and action, adapted many Hindu customs and practices and christianized them through his personal observances. Moreover, he introduced such practices of the Indian Sanyasis in his newly founded Asram and this helped the Bethany monks for a better evangelization among the Hindu brethren. In this way he succeeded in the establishment of an Indian christian Asram. All these show how Indian traditions also quite significantly contributed towards the formation of Mar Ivanios' spiritual life.

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## CONCLUSION

The people of the twentieth century have witnessed what might be called the coming of the age of action. Many of these people have responded with generosity to the "Be ye perfect" that Christ spoke to people centuries ago. Christians in every walk of life are eager for sanctity which is acquired through a loving service to others. If Christians of yesterday feared egoism and worldliness and tended to seek God outside this world by pure adoration; the Christian of today begins with himself and the world. If yesterday's Christian was concerned with self-purification and personal transformation, today he is interested in service, and self-commitment, which for him means action and doing acts of charity for others. In order to acquire his end, that is, union with God for all eternity, he uses himself, as an instrument in leading others to God. Self-imposed mortifications for him seem contrived, compared to the unavoidable crosses of the human conditions.

Among these two types of Christians, it may prompt one to ask here, who is right, or which type of life, is better or more important in our search for God, the prayer life or active life? In Mar Ivanios we see the answer, an answer ultimately given by Christ and His Apostles: both are equally important. According to him a true Christian needs to live both a good prayerful life and a life of service

in order to attain the goal of his spiritual life, union with God in all eternity. He expects them to exist simultaneously in the life of a Christian who is sincerely striving for perfection. He claims this double existence because everyone, who wishes to be perfect, who responds with generosity to the 'Be ye perfect' that Christ spoke to an everyday crowd of Palestine's men, women, and children, is obliged to lead an active life which prepares for, fosters, and safeguards his prayerful life. This prayer life, in turn, stimulates him to further exercise of the virtues and works of charity.

Mar Ivanios, as we have seen in our study of his spiritual life, may be said to be one of the best examples in harmonizing these two lives in his following of Christ. One morning in the Perunad wilderness while he was seen seated on a rock, enclosed by fragile green ferns and other plant life in the forest, communicating with the Eternal Truth, the same evening, he was among his brethren advising them to follow in the footsteps of Christ. One day while he was in the solitude of the Perunad forest, where the golden rays of the sun are stretching down through the tall leafy trees of the forest, which is bathed in quiet except for an infrequent song of a bird or an insect, the next day, he was seen giving a retreat or conference, or walking through the street, reaching out a begging bowl like any Hindu mendicant. Hence, the unification of these two modes of existence—prayer and action—in Mar Ivanios' earthly career reveals his spiritual life.

This is not all; one has not yet clearly perceived the entirety of his life principle. He attempted to adapt his life principle 'Imitation of Christ' to the Indian way of life. Following a monastic life, that is, in true harmony with Christian principles and at the same time bearing the true stamp of Indian culture, he Indianized his life principle. If his kavi-habit and bearded face attracted the Hindus, his wooden cross, attached to a saffron-coloured cotton thread and tied around the neck, was a reminder of man's salvation. Thus, in all possible manner, he could identify with the Hindu monks who harmonize prayer and action in order to attain the Supreme Being.

In short, let us conclude by saying that Mar Ivanios was a man who tried his best to follow, according to the Indian way of life, the life principle, 'Imitation of Christ' in his everyday life. He spent much of his time in attempting to transform himself, before conveying this same message, that of doing God's Holy Will, to his monk followers. However, it could be said even though Mar Ivanios did spend a greater part of his time in prayer, meditation, and liturgical services in the first half of his life, he appears in the second half of life to have stressed the pastoral life. This might be because of the circumstances at that time of his life, and the obligations with which he was entrusted after his Reunion. In other words, one can say that his Reunion with the Catholic Church paved the way for his working for the conversion of his Orthodox brethren. However, it would be true to think that in reality, his busy pastoral life was only an essential prelude to his prayer life.



## APPENDIX I

### The Original Constitution in the Jacobite Church<sup>1</sup>

In the name of the FATHER, the SON and the HOLY SPIRIT. Glory be to HIM now and forever, world without end. Amen.

WHEREAS it is our earnest desire and firm resolve to dedicate our lives to the Glory of God and living in lifelong Poverty, Chastity and Obedience in the Religious life, serve our fellowmen.

AND WHEREAS it is our humble desire by the Grace of God to devote ourselves—all that we are and all that we have—for the Glory of our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ and serve Him in a life of perpetual obedience to Him and pray and work for the extension of the Kingdom of God upon earth and the redemption of men from sin and suffering.

AND WHEREAS we have by the Grace of God resolved to form a religious Community with the abovesaid objects, consisting of an Order of fully professed Monks.

AND WHEREAS it is our desire that the above said Order, should combine a life of Prayer with a life of Service. Missionary activity with works of Charity.

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1. The original copy of the First Constitution, written by Mar Ivanios in 1919, for his Bethany Asram, is now kept in the Apostolic Internuntiate, Delhi. This is its true copy.

AND WHEREAS we have under God's guidance elected to have as our Patron the highest Ecclesiastical dignitary in India of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

AND WHEREAS we have under God's guidance chosen to have the Most Reverend Mar Geevarghese Dionysius as the first visitor of our Community.

AND WHEREAS we have elected the Reverend Father P. T. Geevarghese, the first of the signatories to this document to be the Superior of the Order to which Order we belong from the 23rd of August, 1919, till the 31st of December, 1922.

We the undersigned, Reverend Father P. T. Geevarghese, and Reverend Father Alexios and Deacon Yakub and Deacon Koshy, who have given up for the love of God all domestic attachments and connections and have volunteered to form ourselves into a Brotherhood and live in obedience to the Superior under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, do hereby record that we have accepted the constitution detailed below, reserving for the General Chapter the complete right to revise the said constitution according to the rules laid down herein below:

## **I. Constitution**

The Religious Community constituted under this constitution shall be called the ORDER OF THE IMITATION OF CHRIST, or briefly the Order of the Imitation. The Community shall consist of an order of fully professed Monks, to be called the Brotherhood of the Imitation.

## 2. Government

### (a) *Visitor.*

The Order shall have as Visitor an Indian Bishop of the Orthodox Syrian Church, whether Missionary, or Theebel or a Ruling Bishop. The first Visitor shall be the Most Reverend Mar Geevarghese Dionysius elected for life. Subsequent visitors shall be elected by the General Chapter. The duty of the Visitor is to see that the rules of the constitution are carried out.

### (b) *General Chapter*

The General Chapter consisting of all the fully professed Brothers governs the Order and regulates its work. The decisions of the General Chapter are final, for all of an equality of votes, the Father Superior shall have a casting vote. Voting shall always be by secret ballot.

The General Chapter of the Order will ordinarily meet once a year on the day following the feast of Pentecost, if possible immediately after a Retreat, which will ordinarily extend to ten days. And extraordinary meetings of the General Chapter can be convened in case of any special need by the Superior or by a majority of the professed Brethren. Brethren who are unable to be present at a meeting of the General Chapter can send their votes in the case of the election of a Superior for the Order or of a Novice for Profession or of any proposed alteration in the rules. In other matters absentees from the General Chapter shall not have the right to exercise their votes. Three months' notice shall normally be given to all the fully professed Brethren

before any extraordinary meeting of the General Chapter. In matters involving a change of policy or any general principle regarding the life of the community, resolutions adopted by two-thirds majority in two consecutive meetings of the General Chapter with a period of twelve months intervening shall be final.

(c) *Superior*

The Superior shall be an Indian Priest of the Orthodox Syrian Church. The Superior is elected by the General Chapter from amongst the fully professed Brethren for a period of three years, but he may always be re-elected, but never for more than one additional term in succession. The Superior elected shall report his election to the Visitor. The votes of two-thirds of the fully professed Brethren are necessary for the election. If no one obtains a sufficient number of votes, the retiring Superior remains in power till the next meeting of the General Chapter which by a two-thirds majority agrees upon a Superior. In the event of the death of a Superior, the Senior Brother amongst the fully professed Brethren carries on the work of the community till the General Chapter meets and formally elects a Superior. The Superior shall, during the period of his office, have complete control over the entire work of the community and its finances and property. He sees that the decisions of the General Chapter are carried into effect. He appoints or removes the various office-bearers of the Order including the Superiors of Branch Houses and assigns his sphere of work to each member of the Brotherhood. His orders are to be obeyed both in letter and in spirit by all the Brethren. In an extreme case the majority of the Brethren can appeal against

an order of the Superior to the General Chapter, but the order is to be obeyed unless and until the General Chapter, decides against it. The Superior may under extreme circumstances, giving rise to scandal or disorder, be removed from office at any time by the Visitor at the request of a majority of three-fourths of the professed Brethren.

If at the end of his term of office, a new Superior is elected, the retiring Superior returns to his former place in the community and lives under obedience to the new Superior like the rest of the Brethren.

The signature of the Superior shall be valid and binding upon the community in all legal transactions.

Superiors of Branch Houses are free to make plans for the work of which they are in charge and they assign work to each of the Brethren whom the Superior General of the order has put under them. They will consult him in any difficult question that may arise. They may not undertake any new work without obtaining his leave beforehand, which he may withhold if he thinks fit, till there has been a meeting of the General Chapter. The various office bearers of the Order shall submit in writing a report of their work for the year just passed. The Superior General and the Superiors of Branch Houses shall together prepare the agenda for the General Chapter and will also lay before it the financial statement and the Balance sheet for the past year as well as the budget for the ensuing year.

### 3. Membership

#### (a) *Postulancy.*

Postulants are those who seek admission into the community. They will keep whatever rules the Superior gives them. They must remain postulants at least one full year. A postulant has no right to speak or vote in the General Chapter.

#### (b) *Novitiate.*

Postulants approved by the Superior will be admitted as Novices of the Brotherhood according to the form in use in the order. The Novitiate is the time for testing the Novice's vocation and his readiness to dedicate himself to God in the Brotherhood for the rest of his life. It will last at least four years in the case of every novice. Novices must keep the rules of the Brotherhood just as the professed Brethren do, except when they are dispensed from some part of it by the Superior. They will also live in all respects as though they had taken permanent vows of Poverty, Chastity, Obedience and Stability. The Superior may, if he wishes, invite them to be present at meetings of the General Chapter, and if invited they may speak but shall have no right to vote. They are free to leave the community at any time; and the Superior can send them away at any time if he thinks they are not meant for the religious life in the Order.

#### (c) *Profession.*

When the Superior is satisfied that a Novice is called and is ready to dedicate himself to God in the Brotherhood for the rest of his life, he shall propose him to the General Chapter for election, after

he has given at least three months' notice of his intention to do so. If he is elected by at least two-thirds of the fully professed Brethren, he will be admitted to profession according to the form in use in the community and will take vows of Poverty and Chastity, Obedience and Stability for a period of three years after which he will take his life vows. Though the Brotherhood permits no one to take vows far more than three years at a time, yet it is to be clearly understood that no Novice is to be admitted to profession unless he himself and the General Chapter record their belief that he is willing to live under these vows in the Order for the rest of his life on earth.

If a Novice proposed for election is not accepted by the General Chapter, the Superior shall decide whether he shall be proposed for election again or not. But he shall not be proposed again for election for another twelve months. At the end of every three years each Brother shall renew his vows for a further period of three years according to the form in use in the community. If any Brother does not desire to do so, or if the General Chapter by a two thirds vote refuses him permission to do so, he must leave the community.

#### **4. Dismissal**

If any Brother continually refuses to obey the Rule or becomes a grave cause of scandal, the Superior or a majority of the Brethren can call a General Chapter which may, by a two thirds vote, remove his name from the roll of professed Brethren. The removal shall take place after the Brother has been given, what the General Chapter considers, the fullest opportunity, for explaining his conduct before a

committee of professed Brethren appointed by the General Chapter. The removal shall not take effect until the Brother has had thirty days' time to appeal to the Visitor if he wishes to do so in which case the Visitor will decide whether the proposed removal is in accordance with the constitution of the Order.

## 5. Property

The Order of the Imitation may acquire property and use it for the purpose of serving humanity along religious and philanthropic lines. But every individual member of the community shall live in absolute poverty and shall not acquire any property for himself. Further as a result of his vow of Poverty a Brother divests himself of even the normal right to acquire any property for himself; further he lives on such bare necessities of life as the Superior may allow him to have.

A Postulant may have property of his own. If a Novice has a private property he cannot use any of it for himself during his Novitiate. He must live in the community as a Novice on exactly the same conditions with regard to maintenance as a fully professed Brother. A Novice shall entirely dispose of his property before his profession. He is not obliged to give any of it to the community. If after his profession he leaves the community of his own will, or is dismissed from it, he cannot claim any money or other property which he may have given to the Order or to any work with which the Order is connected.



The sanction of the General Chapter shall be necessary for the Superior in buying and selling property. Similar sanction shall be necessary for the Superior for borrowing any amount exceeding Rupees one hundred.

## **6. Change in the constitution**

This constitution can be altered only:—

1. At an annual meeting of the General Chapter, at least three months' notice having been given beforehand of the proposed alterations to all the Brethren, and

2. By a majority of at least two-thirds of the fully professed Brethren and

3 With the consent of the Visitor.

## **7. Records**

The General Chapter shall frame its rules of business and By-Laws for the effectual working of the constitution and shall keep the following records:—

- a) The minutes book of meeting of the General Chapter.
- b) The Roll of fully professed Brethren and Novices,
- c) All the necessary books and documents relating to the finances and property of the community.

## **8. Extinction of the Order**

The Patron alone, acting with the free, unanimous and written consent of all the Indian Bishops of the Orthodox Syrian Church in communion with the Brotherhood (whether Theebel, Missionary or Ruling) including the Visitor, recorded in two consecutive meetings convened for the express purpose, with an interval of at least twelve months intervening, may put an end to the life of the Brotherhood, and vest the properties belonging to the Brotherhood in any existing, Religious Community that carries on evangelistic work or Christian charitable work outside the Orthodox Syrian Church.

## **9. Provisional General Chapter**

The undersigned being yet Novices only in the Order, it is resolved that till the time when there are at least three professed Brethren to form a regular Chapter, a Provisional Chapter shall be formed consisting of the four signatories to the constitution. This Provisional Chapter shall have all the powers given to the General Chapter by this Constitution. This Provisional Chapter shall have the right to co-opt, for the purpose of enlarging itself, persons who have been Novices in the Order of the Imitation for four years. As soon as at least three of the Brethren are admitted to full profession by the Superior, the Provisional Chapter will cease to exist and a Chapter of the fully professed Brethren will form the General Chapter contemplated under this constitution.

10. The above is intended only as a tentative constitution to be worked as an experimental measure for a period of six years; and at the end of the period and with such modifications as the General Chapter may wish to make, as a result of the experience gained during the first six years, this constitution will be submitted to the Visitor for approval.

Bethany, Perunad Village,

Pathanamthitta Taluk, Travancore.

2<sup>rd</sup> August, 1919/7th Chingom, 1095.

Dedicated before the Altar on 9th March, 1920.

Fr. P. T. Geevarghese, Sd/- \_\_\_\_\_

Fr. Alexios, Sd/- \_\_\_\_\_

Deacon Yakub, Sd/- \_\_\_\_\_

Deacon Koshy, Sd/- \_\_\_\_\_

### Meaning of certain terms in this constitution

- “Local Ordinary” – the ecclesiastical ruler of a diocese or an archdiocese
- “Father General” – the common head of the entire congregation.
- “Asram” or “Ashram” – any religious house.
- “Diara” – a perfect house with not less than six professed religious.
- “Reesh-Diara” – the Superior of a perfect house.
- “Zoor Diara” – an imperfect house.
- “Rabo” – the Superior of an imperfect house.
- “Kadmoya” – the head of a Mission house
- “Brother” – any religious - priest or lay-brother
- “Gisabra” or “Syndica” – procurator
- “Counsellor” – the same as “Councillor”.
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## **APPENDIX II**

(Mar Ivanios' letter to His Beatitude Ignatius Elias,  
Patriarch of Antioch)

### **The Malankara Syrian Church**

The Most Rev. Mar Ivanios,  
Archbishop/Metropolitan,  
Bethany.

Catholic Archbishop's House,  
Tiruvalla, Travancore, S. India,  
19th January, 1931.

Your Beatitude,

I trust Your Beatitude is aware of the great step the Holy Spirit enabled me to take, in that I made my submission to the Pope, the successor of St. Peter the Prince of the Apostles and was thus Reunited with the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. I am supremely happy in that the most merciful Lord gave me this privilege. But my joy and happiness can never be complete unless, and until Your Beatitude, and all the Jacobites forsake their schism and enter into the unity of the True Church.

Our Lord founded one Church only. He founded it on St. Peter. He entrusted the keys of the kingdom to St. Peter. He authorised St. Peter to confirm his brother Apostles in the True Faith. He gave the Universal Pastoral charge to St. Peter. The Pope is the true successor of St. Peter. He is the Universal

Bishop of Christendom and the divinely appointed centre of Unity for the visible Church on earth and the infallible guardian of the Catholic Truth.

The Nomo—Canon of Bar—Hebraeus, which is recognised by Your Beatitude as the authoritative guide to the Canon Law of the Jacobite Church bear ample testimony to the doctrine of the unity of the visible church in its corporate life and organization. For, verse I, chapter 7, of the said Nomo—canon says, “There shall be four Patriarchs in the four corners of the world, the head and chief of them all shall be the Patriarch of Rome”.

The Breviary that is in every day use in your diocese says the following:- “Moses is the head of the Old Covenant, while Simon (Peter) is the head of the new (Covenant). They both resemble each other, and God abides in them both. Moses brought (from God) the tablets of the commandments. Simon received (from God) the keys of the Kingdom. Moses built the tabernacle, Simon built the Church. May there is glory to thee, Lord, from both the Old and the New. Halleluyah. May their prayers help us”. Again:- “I am built on that Rock of Simon, the Prince of the Apostles”, says the Church, “Billows and tempests struck against me, but they could not shake me, Heretics (names of heretics are often substituted here) fought against me. But they were vanquished”.

He who despiseth the church, which is the mystical body of Christ, despiseth also the head of the Church—namely Christ himself. Over this universal and Apostolic Church, which is the pillar and

ground of truth, the Pope rules as the successor of St. Peter, by the appointment of our Lord.

May I on bended knees implore Your Beatitude to consider this true doctrine which is clearly set forth in the Sacred Scriptures and in the above quoted and hundreds of other passages in the ecclesiastical and dogmatic books of your communion, and to ask our Divine Saviour for the grace of the humility of heart, which alone can give the light to see and the strength to obey the will of God and enable you to make due submission to His Holy will and heal the wounds in His Body. If only Your Beatitude will prayerfully consider this matter, I am confident that the Divine grace will not fail you. For the reunion of Christendom is God's Holy will. And the Holy Father the Pope and the entire Catholic Church are praying in this Church Unity Octave, for the return of the separated christians to the True Fold of Christ.

There are two schisms which Your Beatitude can heal by a single act. The first of these primarily concerned with your own people in Syria and Turkey. It is the great schism which took place in the east in the middle of the 5th century when the followers of Eutychus and Dioscorus disobeyed the universal church and repudiated the Pope and the Ecumenical council of Chalcedon. Though the Jacobites anathematised Eutychus later, and in principle adopted the Chalcedonian definition of the Catholic Faith, the schism has continued to this day.

The second is one that is confined to the Christians of St. Thomas in Malabar. In the

seventeenth century a section of these Christians revolted against the Catholic Church and went into schism for merely personal and social reasons. This schism had nothing to do with faith and dogma. Later on, the schismatic Christians of St. Thomas accepted the supremacy of the Jacobite Patriarch and thus nominally became Jacobites. The immediate cause of the schism was a false rumour that the Portuguese had drowned a Bishop come to Malabar from the East. This Bishop was not a Jacobite and was not sent here by the Jacobites.

The Jacobite Christians of St. Thomas in Malabar have, during the past two and a half centuries of their connection with the Jacobite Patriarchate suffered and lost a great deal. The greatest loss is the loss of the Catholic Unity. In the nineteenth century a section of the St. Thomas Christians fell under the influence of Anglican Protestants, imbibed protestant teaching, and became adherents of the Church Missionary Society (Anglican), while another section constituted itself into an independent church—called the Mar Thoma Church—whose teachings are no less Protestant than those of the C. M. S. The Mar Thomites are about 100,000 strong now. In the beginning of the 20th century the remaining Jacobites who are over 300,000 strong were again split into two, and wasted much of their resources in mutual conflicts and protracted litigation. The corruptive influence of repeated schisms and internicine strife has brought spiritual life to an extremely low level.

Your Beatitude is aware that I spent all my life for the service and spiritual amelioration of the Jacobite Church. And later, in life the Holy Spirit



most wonderfully taught me that true charity was impossible of attainment in a schismatic body and that those who resist the will of God and obstinately continue in schism and heresy deserve eternal damnation.

The Holy Spirit taught me and my brother Bishop Mar Theophilos and the religious congregations of monks and sisters that God guided to found, that perfection of humility and religious obedience were impossible of attainment in the Jacobite Church, which itself was founded on pride and disobedience. We discovered that all the work we did in the Jacobite church was simply building on sand.

Our Lord built His Church on Rock—on the Rock of St. Peter. Since the Pope is the true successor of St. Peter, for any one to attempt to build apart from the communion of the Pope, is to attempt to build apart from Christ.

I most humbly pray that Your Beatitude return to the True Church. The Holy See has always been ready to receive eastern schismatics and give them every facility to enable them to return to the Unity of the Church. The memorandum that I submitted to the Holy See exposing our desire to be received into the Catholic Church received the most sympathetic consideration. Your Beatitude is also aware that the Catholics of the Pure Syrian Rite in Syria were most cordially received by the Holy Father. They use practically the same Missal and ritual as the Jacobites do, and have their own hierarchy. Since their re-union with the Holy See they have made progress in every way, while those who

persisted in schism have steadily declined. Social and moral degradation has been the consequence of spiritual degeneration. Systematic rejection of divine grace on the part of the schismatics has met with its inevitable reward.

Providence has called Your Beatitude to Your present position. I believe the Holy Spirit invites Your Beatitude to surrender yourself entirely to His guidance and forsake your schism and enter into the unity of the Catholic Church by confessing the entire Catholic Faith and making your submission to the Pope—the one centre of unity for Christendom. The Church of Christ is one and indivisible, one in faith, one in organisation, one in the unity of its life as manifested interiorly in her mystical union with her Bridegroom, and interiorly in the corporate sacramental unity that subsists among the members of the visible Church, constituting them into the one kingdom of God upon earth. The Pope, the Vicar of Christ the King, guides and rules the entire church on earth with the joyful co-operation and loyal support of all the Patriarchs, Archbishops and Bishops who constitute the hierarchy of the Catholic church.

I am confident that if Your Beatitude would have the humility to return to the House of God, Your Beatitude will be able to lead several thousands of schismatics into the Catholic Church and thereby assure their salvation, and bring abundant glory to our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is the charity of our Lord Jesus Christ that has constrained me to write this humble letter to Your Beatitude. May I, with all the humility of heart that I am capable of, implore Your Beatitude to do all that lies in your power to heal the Jacobite schism and gather all the scattered Jacobites into the unity of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. For it is the will and prayer of the Lord that “they may all be one”.

In most ardent prayer that the Holy Spirit may enlighten Your Beatitude and with most affectionate and respectful sentiments,

I remain,

Your Beatitude's devoted servant  
in Jesus Christ,

Sd/-

Archbishop/Metropolitan—Bethany.

To

His Beatitude,  
Moran Mar Ignatius Elia,  
Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch  
MOSSUL.

## **APPENDIX III**

(Text of Dr. Joseph C. Panjikaran's interview  
with Mar Ivanios)

Dr. Panjikaran: "When yet a Jacobite what is it that specially struck your Grace as the outstanding feature of the Catholic Church?"

Mar Ivanios: "The outstanding feature of the Catholic Church is the fact of its sure guidance on everything connected with life, both for individuals and for mankind."

Dr. Panjikaran: "How did Your Grace arrive at the conclusion that the church is the surest guidance?"

Mar Ivanios: "A number of considerations, forced me to this conclusion. The Catholic Church is the only true and perfect embodiment of historical christianity, the religion that Jesus Christ brought into the world. Again, there are forces at work in the modern world that attempt to shake human society to its very foundations. My studies and observations have led me to the conclusion that the catholic church is only institution that has in the past with stood and can forever withstand successfully the conslaught of these disruptive forces."

Dr. Panjikaran: "Will Your Grace kindly explain further these points?"

Mar Ivanios: "My studies in the origin and history of the Catholic church and particularly of the beneficial results it has produced in society in general and in the lives of the saints, ancient and modern, in particular led me to this conclusion. The conception that the catholic church is the Living Organ of Christ finds its practical expression in all its aspects only in the Catholic Church. She alone fulfils the purpose for which God became man, viz. the salvation of individuals and of society. She alone is the Mystical Body of Christ on earth. In her alone can men have the assurance that Jesus Christ is the Way, teaches the Truth and gives the life that is in Jesus Christ our Lord and God. I found too that the non-catholic types of Christianity were both inefficient and insufficient to fulfil the very purpose for which Our Lord founded His church. Among the various warring forces national, racial and economic, I found that there was only one force supra-national, supra-racial and superamundane which could mould human society into a homogeneous whole and bring lasting peace and divine blessing to humanity at large. As far as one can at present peer into the future, the Catholic church is the only force that can stabilise human society and ensure its progress."

Dr. Panjikaran: What further points struck you as noteworthy in the Church?

Mar Ivanios: The Catholic church preserves the balance between authority and obedience, between private

judgement and the infallible voice of the church, between individual freedom and social obligation. The catholic church alone gives its rightful place to the family as the unit of society, and to corporate life as the means of progress and culture.

Dr. Panjikaran: “What decided Your Grace to take the final step?”

Mar Ivanios: “The painful realisation of the sinfulness of schism. The Jacobite church is one of those schismatic bodies that broke away from the unity of the church in the early centuries. I knew the fulness of catholic doctrine and yet I found myself unable to realise it in the schismatic church. It was a cause of grave mental anxiety. The catholic church being the Home of the Holy Spirit upon earth, I felt that to remain in schism with her was a grave sin. Divine Providence led me step by step almost imperceptibly until at last I found myself in the Catholic Church.”

Dr. Panjikaran: “How many have so far followed Your Grace into the church?”

Mar Ivanios: “My suffragan, Mar Theophilos Bishop of Tiruvalla, two Rambans who were Bishops designate in the Jacobite church and 19 out of the 24 members of the Brotherhood – one out of the remaining five has taken life vows—and all the 13 members of the Sisterhood of the Imitation of Christ, the two congregations that I founded have followed me into the Catholic church.

Hitherto 32 clergymen have applied to me in writing for admission into the Catholic Church. I am expecting several more.”

Dr. Panjikaran: “What is at present your Grace’s most urgent need?”

Mar Ivanios: “I should say, sheds that would serve as temporary places of worship and cemeteries for the use of the convert congregations. Within the last two months I have had application from over a hundred and fifty places asking that churches and cemeteries be provided for intending convert congregations. I am not keen on starting work immediately in all these places, but intend to begin on a small scale and build up slowly but steadily.”

Dr. Panjikaran: “How much would a chapel cost?”

Mar Ivanios: “On the average £ 100 (500 dollars) would provide a chapel and cemetery, which would satisfy the most urgent need in many places. Here too, as in other places, all denominations of Protestants are united in opposing the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, the propagation of the True Faith being God’s most dear cause is sure to succeed in this country as it has done elsewhere. In fact, I feel that the harvest is ripe. We need the help of the prayers of the faithful everywhere for gathering the harvest in.

The Brotherhood and the sisterhood also stand in need of help. The Brotherhood is partly supported by the mass stipends of the monks. But the sisters are hard up even for their daily food. If they had a school, they would both support themselves and do very necessary work for propagation of the Faith.”

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## **APPENDIX IV**

(Mar Ivanios' letter to Pope Pius XII on the question  
of Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven)

May it please Your Holiness,

I, the undersigned, Mar Ivanios, Metropolitan Archbishop of Trivandrum of the Malankara Syro-Antiochene Rite, Your Holiness's devoted son in Christ, beg leave to express hereby my explanation and judgment concerning the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven, body and soul. I do this in answer to Your Holiness's circular letter of 1st May, 1946, sent to all the Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops, Bishops and local ordinaries of the whole Catholic Church.

The Archdiocese of Trivandrum of the Malankara Syro-Antiochene Rite over which I preside under Your Holiness's Supreme Petrine jurisdiction came into existence in 1932 two years after my re-union with the See of Peter in 1930. The faithful of my Archdiocese are composed of souls received into the Church from the Jacobites, Marthomites (Reformed Jacobites) and other schismatics as well as from non-Christians of various castes and creeds. Among my priests there are those who were ordained in Malankara Schismatic Church as I myself was; there are some I



conditionally ordained after my re-union; and there are others who received ordination after going through a course of Theology in major seminaries conducted by Catholic priests; and of these latter some are re-united, while some are young men who were originally Catholics of the Syro-Malabar Rite. There are also under me Syro-Malabar priests lent to me by the Syro-Malabar Bishops and by the Prior General of the Tertiary Syro-Malabar Carmelite Congregation.

My priests and I believe and teach that the Blessed Virgin Mary after her physical death was assumed into Heaven soul and body. Those of my priests who were born and brought up in the Catholic Church believe this doctrine as something handed on to them from all antiquity. Regarding those re-united from Jacobitism both clergy and laity, I have no hesitation to say that they find in this doctrine the same teaching that they were believing while they were in the schismatic Jacobite Church. Those reunited from the Marthomite and similar bodies may not have had any idea about this, their former tendency having been to belittle the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Jacobite Church both of Malankara and of Syria, celebrate the Transitus (Shunoyo) of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the 15th of August, and the Feast is preceded by a fast called the FIFTEEN DAY'S FAST, the last day being the Feast day itself. The Divine Office assigned for the Feast and for the days that precede and follow, speaks in the clearest terms that the soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary was separated from her body at her death, and that her

soul and body were transferred to Heaven after her death. The ancient Syrian Office containing these passages is called PENKISO. The Jacobites of Syria have it only in manuscript copies. Hence only few Syrian manuscript copies are to be found among the Malankara Jacobites. Nevertheless the Jacobite Cor-Episcopa Mathew Conatt (appointed Malpan-Doctor of Theology-of Malankara by a former Jacobite Patriarch, Peter III, who visited Malabar in 1875) selected certain passages from the Syrian PENKISO and published them in book-form in Malayalam for the use of the laity as part of the layman's prayer book. Patriarch Ignatius Abdullah, on the occasion of his visit to Malankara in 1910, approved the translation and ordered the laity to use it. It was published again in 1927 from St. Thomas Press, Mulamthuruthi. At present there is a faction in the Malankara Jacobite Church, one party supports the Patriarch, and the other party supports the Catholicos. There is no doctrinal difference between the two sections. The Jacobites of both sections use the PENKISO as well as this book of selected prayers in Malayalam. The importance of the latter comes from its being published for the use of the faithful in Malayalam, the everyday language of the people, as part of the Divine Office for the use of the laity. The passages therefore that favour the doctrine of the Assumption must be said to express the faith of the Jacobite clergy and laity. May I cite below the pertinent passages translating them from Malayalam in which language they are used in Malankara.

The Prayer Book of the  
Jacobite Syrian Christians of Malankara  
(2nd Edition 1927)

The following passages are given under the heading on page 211, "Prayer to be said along with the Evening Office, every day from August 1st during the FIFTEEN DAYS' FAST preceding the Feast of the Assumption". Page 230: "O Lord Thou didst receive the soul of Thy Mother at the time of Her death, coming down as Thou didst with the assembly of Angels. Prophets Martyrs and Ancient Fathers, so do Thou in Thy mercy look upon and accept our fasts and prayers. In the same manner as Her body was lifted up into Heaven in the midst of the solemn reception and songs of the Angels and of all the Saints, so may our fasts and prayers be lifted up before Thee into Heaven."

Page 216: August 15, the Feast Day—Evening Office.

"O God Christ, who didst honour and lift up the body of Thy Mother into Heaven in the midst of the solemnity of the choirs of all the Apostles who were living and who had departed, and of the Prophets and of all the Heavenly Host may the Prayer of Thy Mother be a fortress to us. In her going up into Heaven the air (atmosphere) was sanctified and the earth was blessed".

"Blessed art thou, O Holy Mother of God, because thou didst become the Throne of God. Who can describe (adequately) the event of the taking up solemnly into Heaven of the Blessed Virgin Mary, His Throne, by the Angels of the Son of God and by the Prophets and the Apostles who were all well pleasing to Him. O virgin Mother, may thy prayers help us to glorify with joy thy holy and happy state and to resemble thee."

Page 218: The Feast Day—Morning Office.

“Indescribable are the miracles and helps which were worked by Her, while She was alive and also after Her soul had departed Her body, from Her cot and from Her bed and from Her clothes. Holy Mother, since thy prayers are incomparably acceptable before the Son of God to whom you gave birth, do have the compassion to pray for us.”

“O Mother of God, thy only begotten Son has clearly shown forth by thy death and by thy going up to Heaven that thou art verily the Mother of God, the Queen of Saints and the Pride of Christians.”

“The hosts of Angels, the just, the holy ones, the saintly ones, the Prophets, the Apostles, the Holy Fathers and Doctors, assembling in choirs and standing in rows shouted forth praises in solemnity and lifted up Her body with praise and with reverence.”

“O Lord, grant that we be led forth to places full of repose and joy by Thy Angels of peace”.

This Jacobite Office which was introduced into Malankara three centuries ago reflects the old Faith of the Jacobite Church which had its origin in Syria in the sixth century. The faith in the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary was not anything newly invented by the Jacobites at any time. It is the common heritage of all ancient Christian bodies. If it had been invented and newly introduced by the Jacobites, the other Christian bodies would have found fault with them in

this matter. So, too, the Jacobites would have blamed the other Christian bodies if they had invented it at any time. The fact that the Nestorians, who were the immediate neighbours and the most implacable foes of the Jacobites, do not find fault with the Jacobites in this doctrine, is clear proof that this doctrine is pre-Nestorian, and had been handed down from the undivided Syrian Church which existed before the schism arose between the Nestorians and Jacobites. The Nestorians, too, celebrate the Feast of the Assumption (Shunaya) on August 15, and they too have 15 days' fast before the Feast, which is itself a clear proof that the tradition and the practice of the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the faith in Her bodily Transitus into Heaven existed before the period of the separation of these two sects. As there is no age in the history of the Church to which one can point out that this belief in the bodily Transitus of the Blessed Virgin Mary was newly introduced, we must infer that it is Apostolic in origin.

Schism arose in the Syrian Church of St. Thomas in Malankara (Malabar) as a result of the attempt of Latin missionaries to introduce Latin customs and liturgy into this Oriental Church. And in 1663 a Jacobite prelate was welcomed by the schismatics into Malabar. The schismatics could not have had any objection to agreeing with the Jacobites in the teaching about the Assumption of Our Lady. To illustrate this, may I be permitted to go back to the past history of the undivided St. Thomas Syrians of Malankara.

Till 1653 the Apostolic Syrian Church of Malankara was one, and was using the Syro-Chaldean rite: From 1600 to 1653, the year of the split, all the St. Thomas Christians were under the rule of Latin prelates. Before that period it had Syro-Chaldean prelates. The Synod of Diamper of 1599 which made revolutionary changes in the Syro-Chaldean Church of Malankara (Malabar) says, in decree 10, Actio VIII:

“Approbat insuper Synodus jejunium praemitti solitum ad assumptionem Dominae nostrae a prima augusti ad illud festum”.

The feast therefore and the fast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary were being kept by the Syrian Church of Malankara (Malabar) before 1599.

It will therefore be very pleasing to my clergy, people and myself to have the doctrine of the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven declared as a dogma of the Catholic Church.

With regard to the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar, both the Syro Malankareans and the Syro-Malabarians, such a declaration will give a new impetus to their filial devotion to the Mother of God whom they venerate in a very special manner. They alone in the whole world observe an EIGHT DAYS' FAST ending with the FEAST of the Nativity of Our Lady, thus manifesting that they have a special devotion to her. The characteristic of this Fast, traditionally believed to have originated in the ninth century, is that

in some parts of Malabar even non-Christian girls keep it giving offerings to Christian churches and praying in them, e. g. at Manarkad Church in the Jacobite Heptarchy of Kottayam and at the Church of Nagapuzha in the Syro-Malabar Archdiocese of Ernakulam. Unmarried girls, and girls who are married but without children, assemble in the church during these fast-days and spend the daytime in fasting and prayer.

I therefore with my priests and people most humbly beg Your Holiness to have the doctrine of the bodily Assumption into Heaven of the Mother of God declared as a dogma of the Church. Hoc enim licet, decet atque expedit.

Humbly prostrating before  
Your Holiness and begging blessings.

I remain,

Your Holiness's devoted son in Christ,

Sd/-

Mar Ivanios,

Archbishop of Trivandrum

## APPENDIX V

(Mar Ivanios' letter to Sister Basim SIC)

The Most Rev. Mar Ivanios,  
Archbishop/Metropolitan,  
Bethany.

Catholic Archbishop's house,  
(Camp) Tiruvalla,  
Travancore, S. India,  
9th February 1932.

My Dear Daughter,

This letter is for you to read as part of your spiritual reading.

The Holy Lent has come inviting you for a renewed effort to unite with God in deeper humility, and offering you new graces to dispose you to compunction and penance, and calling you to detach yourself from yourself, and enter into strict enclosure with Jesus living in your soul. "The kingdom of God is within you". The Holy Lent warns you not to abandon yourself to any false security and invites you to take great care not to slumber. As your spiritual father, you have discovered to me some of those domestic thieves who are best known to you. You have to use great vigilance against them, and labour hard to conquer them. A thousand holy practices that you may observe daily will not avail you to attain sanctification and perfection if you do not conquer—and really and fully—those evil passions of self-seeking, false pride, irreverence, disobedience, mutual



spite, proneness to irregularity and slovenliness, irritability and many other domestic thieves that lurk within yourself. These thieves may all be comprised under one name—insolence of the mind, self-exaltation. This is the season for practising “mortification of the interior”. Mortification of the exterior senses as well as of the interior passions is very very necessary. During this Lent I have no doubt you have chosen special intentions and spiritual purposes for yourself. Do go on with all those spiritual exercises, in the spirit of perfect mortification of self, of perfect poverty of spirit, desiring for the love of Jesus Christ to enter into a total destitution.

Study how to practise self-mortification, and resist sensuality. Study fervently how to live in subjection and humility and obedience. Love to be kept under discipline. Desire not to rule over any body. Long to live in obedience and utter humility. Love to be humiliated even in public. Attend to the presence of God in your soul and imitate the silence of Jesus. Mortify the interior—the thought-region—and enrich your soul with the virtues of Christ.

The Holy Lent being the season of corporate penitence and penance, it would be good for you to take some corporal penance daily during lent if your Father Confessor approves of it. In your own case I should say the absolute renouncement of self-will and perfect resignation to the divine will should be the spiritual motive of the penance—renouncement of self-will in the daily practices.

Your Father in God needs very very much the help of your prayers. I have not been able to write to you, but I have always remembered you before the blessed Altar. Do remember me very fervently. I have plenty burdens. I know your prayers will bring me abundant grace from above.

The intention for Lent for the Sisters is this:— “Unite with Jesus in His agony in the Garden and share in His baptism of blood in Gethsemene for your sanctification and for the sins of others, especially the sins of schism, pride and self-will”, your own and others.

God bless you and the Rev. Mother and the whole Congregation.

I remain,

Yours affectionately,

Sd/—

Archbishop of Bethany.

Sister Basim.

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